

***'On the Margins of Social Distance:' Expatriate Memories of Life
in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea, 1970-1995***

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This thesis is based on my own research except
where otherwise indicated



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Introduction

All immigrants and exiles know the peculiar restlessness of an imagination that can never again have faith in its own absoluteness. "Only exiles are truly irreligious," a contemporary philosopher has said.

— Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*¹

One humid day in late 1995, Graeme Little, an Australian expatriate living in the town of Rabaul in Papua New Guinea, drove at furious speed past Vulcan, a volcanic mountain that had erupted in September of the previous year. Vulcan stands on the outskirts of Rabaul — on a major thoroughfare connecting the town with Kokopo, a growing business centre located about 20 kilometres to the southwest. When Graeme drove past the mountain that day in his bright red 4WD, the volcanic ash still covering the road billowed up behind him, generating a cloud of dust that blurred the vision of the drivers passing him on the other side.

Rabaul is situated on the Gazelle Peninsula on the island of New Britain. With a short and sometimes violent history, its recent past has been dominated by cycles of destruction and rebirth: approximately 500 Papua New Guineans were killed when Vulcan emitted poisonous fumes during an earlier eruption in 1937; the town was devastated by Allied bombing following Japanese invasion in 1942. In the years leading up to the eruption of 1994, it had been rebuilt — tourists and visitors attracted by its majestic natural beauty. It stands on the edge of Simpson Harbour, a deep expanse of water formed from the caldera of an ancient volcano; mountains surround the harbour, dropping away to a small flat along which the town has been built. Until 1994 it was still relatively prosperous despite a mild economic downturn — having captured a share of trade in the islands region when

¹Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, London: Minerva, 1991, pg275

the unrest on Bougainville to the south-east of New Britain escalated into full-scale civil war in 1989. Besides natural beauty, the town had also been renowned for its splendid frangipani-lined avenues, while the region as a whole was well-known for its fertile soil and subsistence village agriculture. However, as Graeme drove past Vulcan on the bumpy road into town that day in late 1995, there was little evidence of this beauty and fertility in the surrounding landscape. Tavurvur (also known as Matupit crater) was the first mountain to erupt on the morning of 19 September 1994; Vulcan followed shortly after. Tavurvur is situated on the opposite side of the harbour and destroyed most of the town within the first few days of activity, including the airport and golf course. Vulcan, on the other hand, limited its destruction to surrounding villages and market gardens, although winds carried its ash cloud further inland. Five people died during the eruption, although other casualties could be indirectly attributed to it. Together, the two volcanoes have left a legacy of destruction that has endured beyond 1994 — despite the hopes of many expatriates and Papua New Guineans that Rabaul would be rebuilt again. In 1995, the mountains surrounding the harbour remained majestic — rising starkly and jaggedly from the flat — but they now formed a backdrop to an expanse of grey. Buildings remained half-buried in ash, the few surviving frangipanis struggled to sprout new leaves and flowers; and the bustle and smells of the old Rabaul had long dispersed. Vulcan itself remained bereft of vegetation; in the months following the cessation of volcanic activity, rivulets and small gullies had formed on its surface, giving it a weathered and uneven appearance. Once an innocuous-looking hill supporting small market gardens, it now stood in isolation — surrounded by a silence that seemed to extend to the very heart of the old town itself. As the road meandered and improvised its way into town (much of

the original road had been destroyed by ash and mud-flows), it passed supermarkets and the police station; this area (known as Sector One) remained relatively unscathed during the eruption. As the road journeyed into town, turning into Mango Avenue, it passed the Hamamas Hotel and the Kaivuna Resort Hotel, both air-conditioned and partially restored. Mango Avenue had been the main shopping precinct before the eruption – a central meeting place for expatriates and Papua New Guineans. In the post-eruption, post-apocalyptic era, however, it had been relegated to the great margins of things: away from the main commercial district, away from the reassuring clanking of ships. Perhaps it was this [un]natural reversal of the order of things that lent a certain urgency to Graeme's trip home, that made him career from one small gully in the road to the next as he passed Vulcan, once a marginal presence in the expatriate imagination; now a central feature in it.

Graeme arrived in Rabaul on 20 April 1994 to take up duties as the Manager of Agricultural Supplies and Equipment Pty Ltd. In a written account of the period, he estimated that the expatriate population of the town had numbered 250 'active, outgoing type of people who were deeply involved in Golf, Tennis, Squash and a very active Game Fishing Club.'² 'The majority of expatriates were 'in the Management field although a number of them owned their own businesses.'³ Prior to the eruption the town had been 'well-appointed for night life with the New Guinea Club, RSL Club, Yacht Club, Kaivuna Hotel, Hamamas Hotel, Travelodge and a Coffee Shop that would match most licensed restaurants in Australia.' 'These facilities were somewhat taken for granted and I have heard it said many

² Graeme Little, 'Rabaul 20/10/95'; my personal collection

times since the eruption that *we didn't know how good we had it.*' In 1995, he lived with his wife, Dawn, in a house in Sector One. Bruce and Susan Alexander, an Australian couple managing the Hamamas Hotel, described Dawn and Graeme's home as 'the most beautiful in Rabaul.' In December 1995, its floors gleamed with polish; Christmas decorations and baubles hung from the ceiling. The house had a verandah from which one could view the vista of mountains and harbour. Sometimes Dawn watched Vulcan from the verandah, listening to the sounds of birds in the frangipani and bougainvillea blossoming in her garden. She maintained that the disappearance of bird life from town was a sign of an imminent eruption, claiming in 1995 that small puffs of smoke were still rising from the vents of Vulcan.

For the first few days of the eruption, Australian media attention was drawn to the plight or heroism of Australians caught up in the chaos of the evacuation. The *Daily Telegraph Mirror* ran a story on 24 September featuring '14-year-old Australian schoolboy, Grant Jones, holidaying on the farm managed by his father.' The article focused on Grant's efforts in evacuating the workers of the farm, making the '20km drive back to help his father save the pig farm from mudslides.'⁴ The Australian media also created stories of heroism out of the efforts of missionary Jeff Keogh and engineer Steve Day. The *Sunday Herald Sun* claimed the following day that 'brave Aussie' Jeff had made a 'voyage through hell to rescue a starving tribe trapped on an island between 2 erupting volcanoes.'⁵

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Rory Callinan, *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 24 Sep 1995, pg3

⁵ Rory Callinan, *Courier Mail*, 25 Sep 1995, pg4. This 'tribe' was in point of fact not starving. Klaus Neumann argues that it consisted of about eighty Matupit Islanders who had felt quite safe. See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, Boroko [Papua New Guinea]: Oxford University

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The *Courier Mail* had only praise for ex-Gladstone resident Steve Day who had braved 'hordes of knifewielding rascal gangs, volcanic fallout, looters and mudslides to bring food to thousands of starving refugees...'⁶ When the Australian media was not generating images of Australian heroism, it was concentrating on the spectacular nature of the eruption. Great clouds of smoke billowed out of the two mountains. As the ash fell from the sky, it gathered on the surface of the harbour, leaving it impenetrable. The force of the ash cloud rising into the atmosphere caused dramatic electrical storms and rains that fell heavily on the buildings in town, causing many of their flat roofs to buckle. Ray Martin from *A Current Affair*, a prime-time programme on Australian commercial television, flew to Rabaul to record at first hand the chaos and disorder. 'With a croaky voice, he told his audience that he had seen the "gateway to hell" and marvelled at the "laid-back, happy" locals who "somehow still seemed to smile."' ⁷ Klaus Neumann, in the most comprehensive of published accounts of the eruption, challenges the assumptions underlying these representations, arguing that they served to patronise and marginalise Papua New Guinean responses to the event, indulging a misguided and inappropriate colonial nostalgia.⁸ Papua New Guineans were considered either hapless victims or aggressive looters. The Australian diaspora living and working in Rabaul in 1994 was due in part to the legacies of nineteenth-century European colonialism. In 1884, the British annexed south-east New Guinea and the Germans took the north-east. In 1914, the Australians (who had financed much of the administration of the British colony) took control of

Press, pg68

⁶Rory Callinan, *Courier Mail*, 25 Sep 1995, pg2

⁷See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg69

⁸ *Ibid*, pp68-70

German New Guinea. It was not until 1975 that Papua New Guinea achieved independence from Australia. By concentrating largely on the Australian effort during the eruption, *A Current Affair* and other media services made the experience Australian rather than Papua New Guinean, as if the historical fact of independence was insignificant. Neumann's project aims to re-centre Papua New Guinean experiences, and does this admirably. However, it does not address the fact that the experiences of the Australians in Rabaul during that period cannot be explained or made meaningful through the Australian media's fixation with heroism. Ultimately, expatriate investment in these representations has been limited: they depend on grand gestures, on stark contrasts between good (the heroic Australians) and bad (the looting Papua New Guineans) – devoid of the genuinely complex and subtle fears and suffering that have been defining features of the experience. They rely on a concept of individualism that has no value in its own right, but is self-serving, aimed at stimulating the imagination and senses of an audience 'back home' in Australia. The watchful gaze of Dawn over Vulcan suggests a level of fear which is by its nature un-visual, unspectacular, unheroic – but is ultimately more permeable and remarkable than those sentiments it serves to dislodge.

In September 1995, I arrived in Rabaul to do an oral history of the Australian community living and working there a year after the eruption. By this stage, volcanic activity had ceased, although Tavurvur began emitting ash again in early November and has continued sporadically ever since. Although by 1995 the Papua New Guinean government in Port Moresby had received substantial aid money from international aid agencies for the purposes of re-establishing the township

and resettling villagers, debate and indecision on the part of the authorities meant that many of the thousands of Papua New Guineans affected by the eruption had still not been re-settled. Money was being invested in the development of Kokopo: new restaurants had opened; many of the provincial government offices had been relocated there. However, Rabaul's fate remained uncertain. Tavurvur remained an unknown quantity: genuine concerns were held regarding its ongoing activity. The wet season following the eruption had not washed away the ash on the mountains around the town; any mud flows generated by heavy rain had the potential to destroy or flood the buildings below. And so the town continued to slumber beneath the ashes; those streets and buildings formerly epitomising colonial grace and splendour were now in a strange reversal of fates, slowly disintegrating.

My work as a researcher in Rabaul was difficult to organise and was sometimes awkward. Cheap accommodation was difficult to secure; public transport (which I relied on) was often irregular. The greatest difficulty was securing the trust of a community of Australians who felt forsaken by their homeland and by the passage of time. A defining feature of the community was a strange ambivalence towards Australia. Ray Cheasley, the manager of Rabaul Services and Industry, a subsidiary of BHP Australia, a large steel manufacturing company, had been unemployed in Australia before arriving in Papua New Guinea with his partner, Klara; David Loh, the President of the East New Britain Chamber of Commerce, had arrived in New Guinea in 1970, but claimed he had been forced to take out Papua New Guinean citizenship in the 1980s in order to stay. The expatriates of Rabaul had been in Papua New Guinea for varying periods on salaries that would have been impossible to secure back in Australia. Many were the so-called *two*

year tourists: contract workers who worked in Papua New Guinea for two years and then returned south; Papua New Guinea was a brief episode or sojourn in their life, an opportunity to earn a better life and retirement in Australia. Before the eruption, many expatriates had enjoyed the benefits of the expatriate existence: at that time, Australia was in the midst of economic recession and high unemployment: Papua New Guinea offered them freedom from the hardships back home. However, the eruption had destroyed the quality of that life — destroying many of the entertainment facilities that had formed a central feature of the expatriate social landscape. Most expatriates were dissatisfied with life in post-eruption Rabaul: faced with ongoing social and economic hardship, they felt they had been relegated to the margins of things, forced to live a life of limited possibilities and opportunities; they felt they no longer had a role to play in the re-establishment of the town. A melancholy and disquiet permeated the community that can be defined at best as a dulling of the senses, a prolonged and muted response to life. This atmosphere of unease says something about specific processes of dispersion occurring within the community: the dispersion of its collective memories of itself as principles of localisation have been pursued by the Papua New Guinean Government; the lack of young energy being injected into the community; the lack of a substantial white female presence in the town; the emergence of time (rather than the movement through space) as the motivating force behind the experience of displacement.

This thesis focuses on feelings of disquiet and anxiety within the Australian expatriate community in 1995, looking at issues of dispersion, alienation and displacement and sorrow. I explore these issues through a framework of different

discourses such as natural disaster, loss, individual/collective memory, nostalgia and expatriatism. Each of these discourses is not sufficient in its own right to explain the uneasy lifestyle of the expatriates in 1995; but is useful when juxtaposed or combined. The central focus of the thesis are the interviews I conducted with the expatriates between September and December 1995. In all, I interviewed twenty-five people in Rabaul and interviewed a further eight people in Australia in 1995 and 1996. I do not draw on all interviews; rather, I base my analysis on those conversations which proved most useful in understanding expatriate identities. All interviews were taped and spanned approximately two hours. Additional material has come from a range of sources, including libraries, journals, newspapers, miscellaneous pamphlets, film and fiction. Throughout the thesis, I use the term *expatriate* to refer specifically to the Australians, unless otherwise stated. I also use the term *Rabaul* to describe only the town itself — not the whole of the northeastern Gazelle Peninsula.⁹ I have not attempted to present coherent life stories of individual expatriates: lives and memories are taken up at different points throughout the narrative. This loose structure attempts to do justice to the issues that were most important to the expatriates while also emphasising the atmosphere of fragmentation within the community.

My own role as a researcher needs to be considered. A significant body of literature is devoted to the role of the researcher in the ethnographic context; much of this analysis has been generated through the practices and disciplines of anthropology and oral history. I address my role in the community in the first chapter. By concentrating on expatriate memories and experiences, I necessarily

⁹Cf. *Ibid.*, pg1

prioritise their voices and perceptions throughout the narrative. As Jan Roberts notes in her own book, *Voices from a Lost World: Australian Women and Children in Papua New Guinea before the Japanese Invasion*, this is not an attempt to indulge in a 'nostalgia, glorification, justification or indictment' of expatriate values; I am not attempting to marginalise the important work of writers like Neumann.¹⁰ Rather my thesis aims to complement this work, offering new perspectives on an event that had a significant impact on the day-to-day lives of all communities in Rabaul.

I have divided the thesis into six thematic chapters. The first sets the intellectual context, focusing on the nature of the research conducted in Rabaul, as well as on relevant theories of dislocation and expatriatism, natural disaster and memory. The second chapter looks at how the expatriates remember the natural environment of pre-eruption Rabaul, looking at concepts of environment and remembrance; while the third focuses on historic and contemporary experiences of community life in Rabaul. The fourth chapter looks at expatriate memories of the Australian homeland — using these memories as the basis for further reflection on the expatriate condition in Rabaul. The fifth chapter looks at the memories of Australians who have returned from Rabaul — exploring issues of distance, time and fiction within the experience of memory. The sixth and final chapter returns to the realities of 1995, looking at how the expatriates responded to the natural environment of post-eruption Rabaul. Like the voices of the expatriates themselves, themes are taken up at certain points throughout the narrative — sometimes contextualised historically. In the conclusion, I summarise the

¹⁰See Jan Roberts, *Voices from a Lost World: Australian Women and Children in Papua New*

theoretical concerns of the thesis, emphasising the significance of my research *vis a vis* existing literatures on expatriatism.

Chapter One

Every year, the expatriates of Rabaul have organised the Frangipani Ball to celebrate the blooming of the frangipani flowers following the 1937 eruption. The phrase ‘frangipani blooms again’ was adopted by the editor of the *Rabaul Times* in May 1937 after he came across a ‘little white and yellow blossom...poking its head up out of the branches of the pumice-covered branches in the backyard of the Commonwealth Bank of Rabaul;’¹ the Ball was later established to honour the spirit of survival embodied in that single blossom. In the years following the Second World War, the Ball took on new meanings as expatriates returned to rebuild the town following destruction by Allied bombing. It became a ‘practical demonstration of the belief that Rabaul would always rise above the troubles that beset her — as she has done.’² At that time, tradition dictated that a song be devised by the ‘local Bards’ to the ‘tune of *Happy Days are Here Again*.’³ The song written for the 1952 Ball was concerned more ‘with present conditions than with pre-war events;’ the lyrics expressed new-found optimism — belying the belief that the tragedies of Rabaul’s immediate past had finally ended.⁴

The Frangipani Ball remained an important feature of expatriate life until 1994. It was usually accompanied by fashion shows and general festivities in town. As the years had worn on, however, its original meanings had been lost as the collective and individual memories of the expatriates had dispersed through natural attrition and political and social change. While earthquakes continued to shake the town

¹See Tolala, ‘Territories Talk-Talk’, *Pacific Islands Monthly*, July 1952, pg 21

²See ‘Frangipani Blooms Again,’ *Pacific Islands Monthly*, June 1952, pg 70-71

³*Ibid*, pg 71

⁴*Ibid*

throughout the post-War period, there was, with the exception of a tidal wave in the early 1970s and the seismic crisis of 1983/1985, little evidence that the cycle of relative calm was coming to an end.⁵ The Tolai of the Gazelle, the largest ethnic group in the region, had long held the belief that an eruption would take place at least once in the lifetime of every individual;⁶ however, in the months leading up to the eruption, the town was relatively free from *gurias* (earthquakes). In fact, Chris McKee, Government Volcanologist at Rabaul Volcanological Observatory, notes that a 'levelling survey from Rabaul Town to Matupit Island, completed only 4 days before the eruptions, showed no change in the long-term rate of ground deformation.'⁷

When the volcano erupted in 1994, it brought many expatriate traditions to an end, including the Frangipani Ball. Keen to forge new traditions out of present circumstances and needs, the expatriate community staged the Big Bang Ball in September 1995 to mark the first anniversary of the most recent eruption. The Ball was the first significant social event to be held in Rabaul since the eruption; the expatriates honoured the occasion by dressing up in their best gowns and suits and setting their hair for the first time in months.

In the lead up to the first anniversary, the *Post Courier*, a Papua New Guinean tabloid, published a special supplement on Rabaul. Theo Thomas wrote an article

⁵For details on the crisis, see Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pp32-37

⁶See David Loh, 'Foreword,' in James Danks, *Kaia from Within: the Rabaul Volcanic Eruptions of 1994*, Sydney [NSW]: Wandering Albatross, 1995, pg7

⁷See Chris McKee, 'Rabaul Volcano (An Overview),' in James Danks, *Kaia from Within: the Rabaul Volcanic Eruptions of 1994*, op cit, pg8

about the upcoming Big Bang Ball:

'If you have attended one of those discos in Rabaul prior to the volcanic eruptions which usually lasted till sun up and always had you undecided about which place to go to because every place seemed to provide that same stuff, then you would know what I'm talking about.

Obviously for almost a year now there has not been anything of that sort going on in Rabaul.

So if the volcano has not moved you too far away from Rabaul and you feel that you have missed all [that] action for too long, then the good news for you is the Hamamas Hotel is putting up a Big Bang Ball to mark the first anniversary of the September eruptions...'⁸

The Hamamas Hotel remained the only fully operational hotel in town. It had

retained much of what it used to offer prior to the eruption. Features like game fishing, harbour cruises and land tours are back on offer waiting to be exploited... Work on rebuilding and getting the place into full gear in anticipation of the big event is still going on. According to the Manager of Hamamas, Bruce Alexander, "27 air-conditioned rooms are ready for use. We've still got 17 more rooms to complete; twelve of which have been damaged during the eruption."

Currently the bulk of the customers at the Hamamas are the business people in Rabaul. But since it started operations in early January, business has been slowly picking up and people have moved in...

The eruption could be gone but the damage it incurred on Rabaul is still fresh like the ash and dust that is present but for this "oasis in the middle, the future is rosy."

On the night of the Ball, the Hotel stood out against the darkness of the surrounding streets and landscape. It is situated on the corner of Malaguna Road and Mango Avenue — metres from a petrol station devastated by the eruption. The hotel had been built by Sir Julius Chan (Prime Minister of PNG in 1995); it had been later sold to Gerry McGrade, the father-in-law of Bruce Alexander; and had been considered a 'top-end' hotel for tourists before the eruption.⁹ In 1995, Susan and Bruce Alexander managed its day-to-day affairs.

⁸Theo Thomas, 'Hamamas plans a "Big Bang Ball" to make Anniversary,' the *Post Courier*, 16 August 1995, pg 32

⁹See Tony Wheeler and Jon Murray, *Papua New Guinea: a Survival Kit*, 5th edition, Hawthorn, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1993, pg 319

As people arrived in the Hotel foyer on the night of the Ball, they were greeted with complementary star fruit cocktails before making their way into the dining hall. This hall consisted of large tables seating approximately eight to ten people; a papier maché volcano releasing orange cellophane 'lava' stood in the centre of the dance floor. As the evening progressed, this volcano (signifying Tavurvur) was dismantled by the organisers to create space for dancing.

The people attending the Ball were mainly expatriate — Chinese, Australian, Filipino, English and New Zealander. There were some Papua New Guineans present, but each group tended to keep to itself: the Chinese sat on one table, the Papua New Guineans sat on another. The exceptions to this rule were the Australians, New Zealanders, and British who chatted freely to one another and moved from one table to another.

The Ball provided an opportunity for people to reminisce about the past year in a comfortable environment, in an atmosphere congenial to good will and relaxation. They feasted on a luxurious array of Chinese dishes, salads, fish and roasts, smoking the complementary Winfield cigarettes provided by the organisers. The conversation was largely anecdotal: people reminisced about the hardships they had endured over the last year and their fears for the future. Some spoke about where they had been when the two mountains erupted, how they felt about the apparent lack of action on the part of the provincial authorities to rebuild the town in the months following the eruption. The Ball brought the expatriates together in a unique way: one of the legacies of the eruption had been to disperse people across the Gazelle and to destroy many of the old drinking holes and clubs that had brought them together before the eruption: the Yacht Club, the RSL Club and

the Rabaul Coffee Shop. Brought together, they were able to renew their sense of community and forget about ongoing troubles.

This chapter introduces the main themes of the thesis, looking at discourses and literatures of memory, expatriatism, natural disaster, and loss as they relate to the Australian community in Rabaul in 1995. These discourses are juxtaposed or played off against one another throughout the thesis.

I begin with a description of the period leading up to and including the eruption — providing some background on the history and nature of the Rabaul volcano.

THE ERUPTION

R. W Johnson and N. A. Threlfall's *Volcano Town: the 1937-43 Rabaul Eruptions* is a story about the May 1937 eruptions of Vulcan and Tavurvur and the relatively minor 1941-43 volcanic activity at Tavurvur. It serves as a reminder that 'we can never be complacent about the active volcanoes that are part of the usually peaceful and picturesque Rabaul scene.'¹⁰

In late October 1983, Rabaul town was again under threat of an eruption, officially placed on Stage-Two Volcano Alert. Johnson and Threlfall point out that this declaration signified

the possibility of an outbreak of volcanic activity within weeks to months. The alert was declared following the assessment by the Rabaul Volcanological Observatory of the increased level of local earthquake activity and uplift in the Matupit Island area. These events led to a growing concern felt by the Rabaul community and people in the surrounding area that a volcanic eruption might be imminent. A zone of increased risk including the airport and southeastern part of the town was recognised in January 1984, and people living there were advised that they may be required to evacuate at short notice. Many left the area voluntarily.

¹⁰See R. W Johnson and N. A. Threlfall, *Volcano Town: the 1937-43 Rabaul Eruptions*, (2nd edition), Buranda [QLD]: Robert Brown and Associates, 1992, Foreword

The mood in Rabaul during this difficult time was one of anxiety, mixed with some confusion, not only during the periods of more intense earthquakes, but also ill-founded rumours and misleading reports in the media. However, the threat of an eruption brought together many different sections of the Rabaul community in a co-operative effort aimed at understanding the significance of the geological events taking place, and at devising ways of coping with the threat. These groups included the East New Britain Provincial Disaster Committee, the Rabaul Volcanological Observatory, National Emergency Services, the Rabaul Chamber of Commerce (and the business community at large), education authorities, provincial government departments, and the Rabaul public.¹¹

The eruption did not eventuate; as the months wore on, the earthquakes decreased 'in both strength and number.' Thirteen months later, the alert was lowered to Stage-One, signifying a delay in the eruption from months to years.¹²

Johnson and Threlfall note that a significant percentage of the expatriate population left Rabaul permanently in 1984 as a result of the emergency. Consequently, expatriate memories of the period had begun to disperse by 1994: those expatriates who had lived in Rabaul at the time had left; newcomers took their place who were concerned with the present rather than the past. Susan Alexander maintained in an interview with me that

it's very hard to get in with the oldies, the people who've been here a long time who have the memory....Newcomers would come and probably try to fill that void [left by those who returned to Australia] but because they were newcomers...they just got complacent.

Papua New Guineans had been celebrating the anniversary of independence from Australia on the extended weekend of the 16, 17 and 18 September 1994 when significant and unusual earthquake activity began. In the early hours of Sunday morning, a number of parties across Rabaul were interrupted by a huge *guria*. Sue

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid. There are four stages of alert for a volcanic eruption in Rabaul. The first stage indicates that 'there is a risk [of an eruption] but no cause for alarm.' Stage Two indicates that the 'risk has increased, and a hazard is possible.' Stage Three indicates that the risk 'is serious and a hazard likely.' Stage Four indicates that the 'situation is critical and a hazard is imminent or has occurred.' For further details, see Sue Lauer, *Pumice and Ash: An Account of the 1994 Rabaul Eruptions*, Lismore: CPD Resources, 1995, pg13

Lauer, an Australian who has written an account of the eruption and whose husband Nick, worked as a Senior Volcanological Surveyor at the Rabaul Volcanological Observatory (RVO), estimated at the time that the measurements of the earthquakes were about 5 on the Richter scale. (It turned out that they were actually 5.1). By Sunday lunchtime, the Observatory considered an eruption likely: 'By then it was known that the first *guria* had originated in Greet Harbour (near Tavurvur) and the rest were coming from Vulcan.'¹³ By 5pm on Sunday, the ground was almost in constant motion. In 1983, a Provincial Disaster Committee (PDC) had been established to monitor emergency plans and to supervise rescue, transport, evacuation and welfare in the event of an eruption.¹⁴ The PDC convened that September weekend, setting itself up in the Lands Department Building on Sunday afternoon. Following a recommendation by Chris McKee, it declared Stage Two Alert, which represents a preliminary warning stage. At midnight on Sunday, the PDC was warned by the Observatory that the seismic activity was irreversible and that an eruption was imminent. An hour later, the volcanologists advised the PDC to declare a Stage Three Alert. At 2.00am on Monday, residents in town heard planes flying out of the airport near Tavurvur. When Sue Lauer heard these sounds, her concerns intensified:

Rabaul airstrip has no lights so night flying was prohibited. We soon discovered the police were ordering the evacuation of the town. The two third level airline operators, Airlink and Islands Nationair, had rounded up all their pilots and were using the light of the full moon and headlights of cars positioned along the runway to fly as many of their planes out as possible. We stood on the helipad [on the top of Observatory Hill] and watched. Ships and small vessels were also leaving the harbour.¹⁵

¹³ See Sue Lauer, *Pumice and Ash: An Account of the 1994 Rabaul Eruptions*, op cit, pg9

¹⁴ See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg33

¹⁵ See Sue Lauer, *Pumice and Ash: An Account of the 1994 Rabaul Eruptions*, op cit, pp 11-12

Four hours later, at 6.06am, Chris McKee noticed a white vapour cloud coming out of Tavurvur's crater — signifying the official start of the eruption. Vulcan followed at 7.17am.¹⁶

Rabaul's vulnerability to volcanic activity is due to its position in relation to plates that form beneath the surface of the earth.¹⁷ Each of these plates is approximately 50 to 100 kilometres thick. They move slowly, more or less in consistent directions. As they move, they collide with one another, tearing apart, or overriding one another. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are linked to the plates' movements and occur prominently at their edges.

The New Guinea islands region is particularly complex: several smaller plates are lodged between the larger Australian and Pacific plates.¹⁸ The volcanoes at Rabaul are part of a formation called the Bismark Arc. This stretches from 'Vokeo Island, fifty kilometres northeast of Wewak, to the northerneastern Gazelle Peninsula.'¹⁹ The Rabaul Volcano has been active for thousands of years. It formed about 7000 years ago after the magma chamber (a reservoir of molten rock) of a greater volcano collapsed.²⁰ The depression caused by this collapse is known as a caldera and forms the underlying structure of Simpson Harbour.²¹ The magnitude of the collapse of the Rabaul caldera would have been equivalent to the destruction of Krakatoa Island in Indonesia's Sunda Straits in 1883. During the early chaotic hours of the 1994 eruption, many expatriates feared that they were facing *another Krakatoa*. An eruption of the magnitude of Krakatoa will almost certainly occur

¹⁶See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg43

¹⁷For comprehensive detail on the geology of Rabaul, see *Ibid*, pp9-11

¹⁸See *Ibid*, pp9-11

¹⁹*Ibid*, pg9

²⁰*Ibid*, pg 10

some time in the future in the Gazelle; it is likely to destroy everything within a fifty kilometres radius.²²

Chris McKee has noted that the first hour of Tavurvur's eruption on the 19 September was 'low.' However, the

emissions were very dense and the plume of ash which drifted over Rabaul Town caused an almost total blackout. At Vulcan, even the initial activity was damaging as pyroclastic flows (avalanches of hot gas and lava fragments) swept down the northern flank of the cone destroying everything in their path. About 30 minutes into the Vulcan eruption, the activity intensified rapidly. The eruption column quickly rose to over 20km high and formed a large plume that was driven westwards. With the onset of the strong activity at Vulcan, Tavurvur's eruption also gathered strength. Pulses of very strong eruption continued for the next two days followed by three days of somewhat weaker activity. On the morning of the 24 September a marked decline was evident in the activity of Vulcan, and Tavurvur's eruption was slightly weaker. The Vulcan eruption ended on 2 October but Tavurvur continued erupting until 23 December. A second phase of mild Tavurvur eruption occurred in 1995, between 13 February and 16 April.

Vulcan's eruption was very powerful and the forest and villages within 2km of the volcano were destroyed by a combination of heavy ash fall and pyroclastic flows. Most of the initial damage in Rabaul Town was caused by heavy ash fall, mostly from Tavurvur, amounting to half-1 metre in the first few days and destroying about two thirds of the buildings. Tsunamis with wave lengths to 4 metres were generated during the first 2 days of the eruptions, and floods and mudflows caused serious damage from an early stage.²³

The impact of the eruption on the communities living in Rabaul was also devastating. On the Sunday evening before the eruption, large numbers of Matupit villagers evacuated their homes, assembling in Elizabeth Park in town. At 11.00pm, the PDC started moving people away from the Park to the North Coast Road which travels towards the Baining Mountains.²⁴ When the Stage Two Alert was declared, it was transmitted via the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) on the 6.30pm news, twelve hours before the eruption — although many of

²¹Ibid

²²Ibid, pg 11

²³See Chris McKee, 'Rabaul Volcano (An Overview),' in James Danks, *Kaia from Within: the Rabaul Volcanic Eruptions of 1994*, op cit, pp8-9

²⁴See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg41

its potential listeners had already evacuated.²⁵ At no stage was the emergency siren in town sounded by the PDC — for the simple reason that they felt that ‘the evacuation was running smoothly, and they wanted to prevent Rabaul residents from panicking.’²⁶ The fact that the Matupit villagers evacuated early meant that many lives were saved — in all, five people died directly or indirectly as a result of the eruption. Often, village Elders supervised the evacuation — some had experienced the 1937 emergency and were able to identify the signs of an imminent eruption. Papua New Guineans and expatriates evacuated to Kerevat and Kokopo and the North Coast Road in what proved to be an orderly procession.²⁷ Even as early as Sunday night, however, Rabaul was subject to widespread looting, mainly by Tolai villagers (as opposed to the squatters who lived in settlements around town).²⁸ Food, clothes and cars were stolen; the looting continued for several weeks. It has been estimated by one insurer that “two thirds of the eruption related claims under the company’s policies were for looting.”²⁹

Klaus Neumann notes in his discussion of the 1994 eruption that ‘survivors of a major catastrophe often seek to identify a long sequence of events leading up to it.’³⁰ Some of the expatriates interviewed in 1995 felt compelled to reinterpret the past in this way. Some remembered, for example, the withdrawal of bird life from Rabaul in the days leading up to the eruption; others realised through hindsight

²⁵For a detailed discussion on the involvement of the authorities in the build up to the disaster as well as the evacuation of the Matupit villagers, see Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pp40-51

²⁶See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg43

²⁷See *Ibid*, pg62

²⁸This point made by Klaus Neumann carries a certain irony. In 1995, the expatriates tended to regard the squatters (who were mainly from the Sepik region on the mainland of Papua New Guinea) as responsible for all crime in the town rather than Tolai youth.

²⁹See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg81

³⁰*Ibid*, pg 38

that the lack of seismic activity in Rabaul in the months leading up to September may have actually been a sign that energy was building up beneath the surface of the earth. What had been considered inconsequential events at the time of their occurrence had been imbued with new significance when reconsidered through the frameworks of the present. To some extent personal and collective history always involves this process of re-negotiation and revision — the past is constantly revisited in order to be made meaningful and coherent. However, this process takes on a certain poignancy when located within a larger drama of loss and suffering.

Rabaul's volatile past is remarkably similar to that of Darwin in the Northern Territory (the *Top End*) of Australia.³¹ Juxtaposing the recent histories of these two centres throws some light on the nature of natural catastrophes and the impact they have on communities and individuals. Both towns were threatened by Japanese forces in 1942; both have attracted significant Chinese communities, and have encouraged a 'relaxed, unhurried lifestyle.'³² In the early 1970s, Darwin was 'Australia's forgotten capital.' Films and metropolitan theatre companies took 'their time to reach the Top End.' In Darwin, as in Rabaul, 'you could live your own life. It was free, easy and, a lot of the time, out-of-doors and out of trouble. Darwin was famous for its eccentric characters and friendly locals.'³³ However, what is most striking about the two towns is that they have both been destroyed by natural disaster in the last twenty-five years: Rabaul in 1994; Darwin in 1974. On

³¹ Amirah Inglis has contrasted Darwin and Rabaul as well, but in a different way. See Amirah Inglis, *'Not a White Woman Safe': Sexual Anxiety and Politics in Port Moresby, 1920-1934*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974

³² See Bill Bunbury: *Cyclone Tracy: Picking up the Pieces*, South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994, pg17

³³ See *Ibid*, pg19

Christmas morning 1974, Darwin was almost completely devastated when the eye of Cyclone Tracy passed through it at ferocious speeds, battering houses, lifting cars and rubble off the ground. 46 land deaths were recorded — including thirteen children; sixteen people went missing at sea. Bill Bunbury, a social historian, has collected the memories of people who lived through the cyclone. He notes that Darwin [like Rabaul] has ‘a long history of destruction and rebirth...Cycles of destruction and rebirth have given the Top End’s top town a special character.’³⁴ In the few weeks following the cyclone, Darwin was virtually a city without children: between the 26 and 30 of December, some 25,000 people, mostly women and children, were evacuated from the area, many against their wishes.³⁵ At the time, the devastation of the city overwhelmed those who remained: ‘Some felt that Darwin could never be rebuilt. The city’s right to exist was even questioned. There were wild rumours that the city might be bulldozed, or more soberly, speculation that it might remain merely a defence base.’³⁶ Bunbury argues that many of the people who left Darwin permanently after the cyclone were at the time of their interview in 1987 still traumatised by the experience. Some had found it important ‘to return [there], if only to confront and cope with what happened.’³⁷ He notes that ‘[w]hen any city, let alone the capital of the region, is destroyed, restoration is not just a matter of putting roofs on or rebuilding walls and planting street trees; it’s also a question of ownership and control.’³⁸

³⁴*Ibid.*, pg116

³⁵See Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: the Meaning of Lost Places*, Cambridge [UK]: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pg153

³⁶See Bill Bunbury, *Cyclone Tracy: Picking up the Pieces*, op cit, pg130

³⁷*Ibid.*, pg121

³⁸*Ibid.*, pg114

Peter Read has also collected and studied survivors' memories of Cyclone Tracy. He locates his analysis of these memories within a larger study of human and cultural attachment to place.³⁹ He argues that attachments to place assume different meanings depending upon the culture in which they are formed. Losing a place — one's homeland, one's house or property — through processes of migration, natural disaster or compulsory re-possession (as in the case of Government dams being built on or through private property) can evoke feelings of loss and grief similar in intensity to those feelings experienced following the death of a loved one. His book, *Returning to Nothing: the Meaning of Lost Places*, is a study of mourning; it seeks to understand those intricate patterns of loss and grief that have characterised the lives of many migrants, Aboriginal communities and individuals following dislocation and dispossession.

Bunbury and Read maintain that the difficulties in returning to Darwin following the evacuation had a devastating impact on many survivors. Read notes that 'every one of the score of psychological assessments carried out on the victims of Cyclone Tracy concluded that those who were evacuated from the city and did not return suffered the greatest psychological harm.'⁴⁰ However, very few of the studies 'identified the loss and continued deprivation of a place of attachment as a significant cause of emotional distress.'⁴¹ Bunbury and Read's analysis of the plight of the victims of Cyclone Tracy is useful in understanding the ongoing distress of the Australians who remained in Rabaul in 1995 — although there are some crucial differences. Many members of the Australian community also felt

³⁹ See Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing*, op cit.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pg156

⁴¹ *Ibid*

they had little control over their present and future circumstances. The two East New Britain Chamber of Commerce meetings I attended in October and November of 1995 were dominated by expatriate grievances against the continuing deterioration of the Vulcan Road between Kokopo and Rabaul, as well as the apparent increase in crime in town. The Chamber, representing the business interests of the region, had no formal representation on the Gazelle Restoration Authority (GRA) — the organisation established to supervise the restoration of services and to resettle villagers who had lost their homes. David Loh, the President of the Chamber, felt that the Implementation Unit in the GRA was not prepared to spend money on Rabaul. He told me that he and other expatriates in the Chamber found it impossible to ‘plan ahead.’ People

don’t know how to programme [ahead], when to go ahead and fix up their properties. until the government tells us how long they’re going to have to wait for services [like telephones and electricity]. Or how long they’re going to have to wait for the place to be cleaned. You can’t forward plan without the government telling us [their plans].

Many expatriates felt that they were being discouraged from participating in debates about the town’s future; they felt that as a community they had been discarded, relegated to the margins of political and social life in the region.

David claimed that the town had been quickly re-established following the 1937 eruption because

you had in those days a group of Australians with an administrative base here [in Rabaul] who made decisions on the spot. And being a colonial era where everyone had hundreds of natives on strength... you’d say, “Right do it!” and if they didn’t do it, they’d [be] flogged. I mean, you got things done in those days! [laughing]

David maintained some nostalgia for that bygone era: it was a time when the Australians knew their place in New Guinea; bearers of *civilisation*, they were the source of its governance — making the crucial decisions regarding its future. In

the post-colonial order, this awareness of themselves *vis a vis* Papua New Guineans has become more uncertain and ambiguous. Many expatriates continued to grieve over the volcanic eruption in 1995. This trauma says something about the nature of individual tragedy and loss (as discussed by Read and Bunbury); however, it also says something about the nature of the more marginal role designated the expatriates in post-colonial Papua New Guinea. Some felt that their personal losses (as a result of looting, for example) had been dismissed by Papua New Guinean authorities; as a result, they felt forsaken, seeking redemption for their suffering within the community rather than through identification with other suffering communities. History appeared to have abandoned them; abandoned by history, they found it difficult to emotionally sustain themselves and put the past behind them.

EXPATRIATISM

Nikki Barrowclough once discovered an Australian living in 'remote south-western Bali, on a hill near where the ocean sparkles like grey diamonds.'⁴² He had built a

hotel with primitive plumbing, many candles and a monkey on a long chain carousing in the garden. The Australia was a self-taught glass artist, who spent most of his days practising his craft. After dinner, when the electricity was flickering and the sky was thick and still, he played opera loudly into the night.

At the time we met, in 1992, he had lived in Bali for more than twenty years, and wondered whether he'd ever return to the country he once knew.

He displayed a curious state which can only be described as "nowhereness", in which he seemed uncertain of his place in Bali, and equally uncertain of how he might pick up his life in Australia.⁴³

⁴²See Nikki Barrowclough 'The Return of the Natives,' Good Weekend Magazine, *The Age*, 11 June 1994, pp25-34

⁴³*Ibid*, pg 25

The Australian lived in *voluntary exile*. He remained in Bali because his identification with Australia had diminished during those twenty years of absence. The journey back to Australia would take far longer than the journey away: the expanse of time is, in the late twentieth-century, a more insurmountable distance than the expanse of space.

Some years ago, Barrowclough was also told the story of an

Australian woman living amid the eerie ash and yellow fumes on the volcanic island of Stromboli, off the south-west Italian coast. Her bizarre surroundings seemed to give her life a mysterious edge (she'd been living in Italy and had married an Italian fisherman).⁴⁴

Barrowclough maintains that

“exile” is an intriguing and elusive thing. It suggests someone who embarked on a journey without maps — who has been forced to leave a country of birth, or who has chosen exile as a temporary existence and then stretched it out for years.

It hints at both foreignness and ways of escape, and the opportunity to reinvent one's life among strangers....’

‘There is exile through a lifetime of drifting through countries or cities — the philosophy of impermanence — and there is exile through fate.’⁴⁵ Voluntary exile can be addictive. There is something exhilarating about ‘being a foreigner, a stranger in an unfamiliar setting, someone who, in the end, finds exile more stimulating than belonging.’⁴⁶ As Milan Kundera writes, ‘life is elsewhere;’⁴⁷ much of the twentieth-century has been ‘lived elsewhere’ following widespread migration from war or conflict. Bunbury described Darwin before Cyclone Tracy as a ‘transient’s town that held onto its transients. Many stayed longer than they meant to and came to enjoy the physical warmth and good-

⁴⁴Ibid

⁴⁵Ibid

⁴⁶Ibid

humoured friendliness of the Territory.’⁴⁸ During the Australian administration, Rabaul was also a transient’s town: many visitors transformed short visits into long-term commitments, voluntarily *exiling* themselves from Australia. Before the eruption, Rabaul still attracted transients. However, people were less likely to stay on a permanent basis because of rigid visa and permanent residency requirements.

In the week following the 1994 eruption, the Australian media focused on the sensual, sexy aspects of the expatriate lifestyle in pre-eruption Rabaul.⁴⁹ Judith Whelan claimed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that

Rabaul was the most beautiful town in the Pacific this side of Madang. Nestled in the northward curve of a deep and well-protected harbour, it was rich, fun, relaxed. Those who live there say there was something about its atmosphere that meant you never wanted to leave.⁵⁰

Sarah Harris maintained in the *Daily Telegraph Mirror* the next day that

[i]n past decades, expats living in Rabaul enjoyed a charmed and charming existence. Crime was hardly heard of. People left houses unlocked to hit the local club life or get out on the water in their sailing yachts or game fishing boats....To many returning from holidays to Rabaul was returning home...⁵¹

These descriptions are both accurate and inaccurate. Like the people featured in Barrowclough’s story, many expatriates found the experience of exile in Rabaul more stimulating than *belonging*. David Loh and Tim Wilson have remained in Papua New Guinea, for example, because of the romance of living in a foreign country, away from *an ordinary life* back home. However, there is also an ambivalent side to voluntary exile that is not captured by the mythologies and mysticism promulgated by the Australian media during the eruption.

⁴⁷Ibid

⁴⁸See Bill Bunbury: *Cyclone Tracy: Picking up the Pieces*, op cit, pg19

⁴⁹Janet Hawley, ‘Under the Volcano’, Good Weekend Magazine, *The Age*, 16 Dec 1995, pg35

⁵⁰Judith Whelan, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 Sep 1994, pg27

Barrowclough maintains that while exile can be exhilarating, it can also be inherently *melancholic*.⁵² In departing the homeland, the exile often leaves family and friends: reinventing him/herself without context and without reference to traditions and histories already etched into the ground. Sometimes, the primary purpose of a trip abroad is to leave aspects of oneself behind, moving into a life that is “‘fragmented’” and “‘uncommitted.’”⁵³ The departure from oneself to a ‘new self’ abroad can be frightening.

The Australian lifestyle in post-eruption Rabaul was characterised by both necessary and voluntary exile; by the ambivalence and melancholia described by Barrowclough. What had been a source of freedom before the eruption — *not belonging* — had now become a source of trauma.

When I first arrived in Rabaul, I did not fully appreciate the divisions that had historically defined the expatriate community (divisions between old-timers and the two year tourists, for example; divisions between the Filipino community and say, the Australians). I also did not expect to be regarded with suspicion; to be seen as an outsider — a 3 ½ month tourist — who had no obvious place in the community. I was not the wife of a contract worker; I was not a teacher, doctor, aid worker or lay missionary: these identities or associations also defined a person’s place and role within the community. People (such as myself) who did not fit into pre-existing categories faced difficulties in establishing friendships within the community. Because I shared the same background and language of the

⁵¹Sarah Harris, *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 25 Sep 1994, pp49-50. Klaus Neumann is critical of this style of colonial nostalgia. See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pp66-70

⁵²See Nikki Barrowclough, ‘The Return of the Natives,’ op cit, pg25

⁵³*Ibid*, pg33

people whom I intended to interview, I also did not expect problems of cultural difference. However, I quickly realised that my concept of Australia (and *Australian-ness*) was different to the concept of Australia maintained by many of the expatriates. To share a culture with the older expatriates meant sharing not only a homeland but also the culture and generation in which one had been born in that homeland. When I arrived in Rabaul, I brought a different awareness of Australia with me: history, processes of cultural and social development meant that the Australia of my imagination was different to the Australia of the expatriates' imagination (particularly the imagination of the old timers). The two countries were different; removed from one another through ruptures and schisms in time. My work as a researcher in Rabaul involved not only negotiating a path through different memories; it also involved a negotiation through different cultures within a single community. In a curious process of reverse identification, the expatriates became my cultural other — involuntary exiles within my imagination. Sometimes, their memories of Australia were locked in the past — generalised, un-nuanced. These memories became places of exile: moments in the present exiled from the past. The expatriates' experience of exile was as much an experience of displacement in time as it was an experience of displacement through space.

FEELINGS OF DISQUIET IN THE COMMUNITY

In September of 1995, Craig Skehan from the *Sydney Morning Herald* visited Rabaul to record the decline of a town and its Australian diaspora. Skehan titled his article, 'Apocalypse Now: Rabaul's Year in Ashes' — making reference to the charred landscape and lives in Francis Ford Coppola's war-film, *Apocalypse Now*.

In this article, he described the expatriates remaining in town in generalised terms, arguing that they lived in an undifferentiated present, unable to cast themselves adrift from the past:

Deep psychological imprints were left on those traumatised by the eruptions. Conversations, no matter where they start, turn to personal horror stories from last September or the continuing day-to-day struggle to wind back the clock and get businesses operating again.

Rabaul was a mecca for expatriates as well as foreigners who took up Papua New Guinea citizenship. Their aim was to build a good life in a romantic garden setting of hibiscus and frangipani, casuarina and mango trees. Instead there is anguish and the threat or realisation of financial ruin. Members of the European expatriate community have gained a reputation for being an eccentric, sozzled lot.

The word “feral” is sometimes applied. South Pacific brand beer, along with rum and coke, is favoured. The excellent food and friendly service at the Kaivuna Hotel mean life is not unbearable. But there is a surreal, manic dimension to life in Rabaul these days. Photographs and video tapes of last year’s cataclysmic events are exchanged.⁵⁴

To some extent Skehan was accurate in describing the lifestyle of the expatriates as ‘surreal’ and ‘manic.’ a certain compulsiveness characterised their day-to-day activities. However, a more subtle atmosphere permeated the community that is not captured by these descriptions — that of *disquiet*. The term, *disquiet*, functions as both a transitive verb and an adjective; it suggests an uneasiness brooding beneath the surface of things. The precise *Oxford English Dictionary* meaning of the word is ‘to deprive of quietness, peace, or rest, bodily or mental; to trouble, disturb, alarm; to make uneasy or restless’; it can also mean ‘the reverse of quiet; unquiet, restless, uneasy, disturbed.’⁵⁵ The different meanings of this term capture the restless atmosphere permeating the expatriate community in 1995. This atmosphere was often conveyed indirectly through gestures and actions rather than directly through words.

⁵⁴See Craig Skehan, ‘Apocalypse Now: Rabaul’s Year in Ashes,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sep 16 1995, Spectrum 6A

⁵⁵See *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Vol 3, 1933, pg499

I have found it immensely difficult to write a coherent story from the interviews I conducted in Rabaul. Many stories have suggested themselves to me during the process of transcribing from tape, but most have been unsustainable. In part, this difficulty says something about the tenuous nature of basing a story on oral history. I have had to invent my own methodology and this process, while exhilarating, can also be exhausting. Oral history, in being transcribed and set down on paper or computer, is transformed — undergoing a form of adaptation. As James Clifford argues ‘bringing a culture into writing, rather like sacrifice, simultaneously creates the culture as a book and destroys it as oral life.’⁵⁶ It has been difficult to both sustain and sacrifice the expatriate imagination through different versions of a single story.

However, it was the atmosphere of unease within the community in 1995 that has proven most difficult to describe and explore for, as I noted above, it was not generally articulated openly but was rather expressed indirectly through actions and gestures. This has meant that I have been forced to not only negotiate my way through the cultural otherness of the expatriates as a community (and by extension, my otherness to them); I have also had to form words out of silence; to draw on an atmosphere of silence as much as on conversations.

Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic studies in the twentieth-century shed some light on notions of uneasiness or disturbance within individuals and communities; they have proven useful in trying to understand the internal dynamics of the expatriate community in Rabaul. In his famous case studies of hysteria, Freud argued that

⁵⁶See Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, pp81-82

there were 'active parts of the mind not immediately open to inspection either by an onlooker or by the subject himself.'⁵⁷ He called these parts the *unconscious*.

The unconscious contents of the mind

were found to consist wholly in the activity of conative trends — desires or wishes — which derive their energy directly from the primary physical instincts [such as sexuality]. They function quite regardless of any consideration other than that of obtaining immediate satisfaction, and are thus liable to be out of step with those more conscious elements in the mind which are concerned with adaptation to reality and the avoidance of external dangers.⁵⁸

In order to live a civilised rather than barbarous life, the individual often attempted to restrain the desires and temptations of the unconscious. This process was termed *repression*. This constant battle between the savagery/disorder of the unconscious and the civility/order of the conscious mind was reflected in the struggles of civilisation as a whole.

Of particular interest to Freud were cases of hysteria and neurosis. These conditions were characterised by a disturbance in the unconscious producing physical symptoms like paralysis. Individuals (particularly women) became susceptible to hysteria when they unsuccessfully banished memories to the unconscious realm of the mind. In his famous study of 'Dora,' he argued that hysteria was treated by listening to a patient's dreams (which were a manifestation of the unconscious) and by recording all facts about his or her personal history. By listening and recording the life history of an individual, repressed memories were brought back to conscious life:

In the further course of the treatment the patient supplies the fact which, though he had known them all along, had been kept back by him or had not occurred to his

⁵⁷See James Strachey, 'Sigmund Freud: A Sketch of his Life and Ideas,' in Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories 1: 'Dora' and 'Little Hans,'* trans. Alix and James Strachey, Middlesex: Penguin, 1985, pg18

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pg19

mind. The paramnesias prove untenable, and the gaps in his memory are filled in. It is only towards the end of the treatment that we have before us an intelligible, consistent, and unbroken case history. Whereas the practical aim of the treatment is to remove all possible symptoms and to replace them by conscious thoughts, we may regard it as a second and theoretical aim to repair all the damages to the patient's memory.⁵⁹

To some extent, I have played *Freud* in gathering the expatriates' memories and locating them within an intelligible history. Throughout this narrative, I sometimes use their gestures (like the hysteric's dream life) as substitutes for words — as evidence of feelings of displacement or alienation within past or present circumstances. Unlike Freud, however, I do not attempt to create a story that is seamless and self-contained: there is something inherently unreal about any project that tries to assimilate every contradiction encountered.

THE AUTHENTICITY OF MEMORY

Peter Cohen is an Australian who has been involved in the ship freighting business in Rabaul before and after the volcano. He has been in East New Britain for a significant period of time and remained committed to the re-establishment of the town in 1995. His office is located on Malaguna Rd. He and his wife were active in the Rabaul Yacht Club prior to the eruption.

I met Peter within the first few weeks of arriving in Rabaul. His name had been passed on to me by Pat Hopper, who helps produce the *Una Voce News Letter*, the Retired Officers' Association of Papua New Guinea newsletter based in Roseville, New South Wales.

During our first meeting, Peter told me that I faced an enormous challenge in writing an account of the eruption. Firstly, he maintained that the expatriates were

⁵⁹ See Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories One: 'Dora' and 'Little Hans,'* op cit, pg47

suspicious of outsiders (as proved the case) and would discourage any analysis of their life and circumstances. Secondly, he maintained that even if I were to succeed in gaining peoples' trust, it would be difficult for me to get at the Truth. I would need to distinguish 'the forest from the trees' — to distinguish fabricated or embellished memories from ones based on fact.

From the outset, I did not attempt to find this Truth. Because much of my knowledge of the eruption was gleaned from the expatriates in snippets of conversation, this was an almost impossible task. My lack of familiarity with *Tok Pisin* (the *lingua franca* of Papua New Guinea) and *Kuanua* (the language of the Tolai) also meant that I had no systematic way of comparing expatriate versions of the eruption with those of the different Papua New Guinean communities living in the region. There are obviously facts relating to the eruption that can be considered Truths — for example, the fact that Tavurvur erupted before Vulcan, and so on. However, the emphasis in my research has been more on the ways in which the expatriates reflect on their experiences — on how these experiences have assumed significance in their lives. To have simply pursued Truths would have been uninteresting and fruitless: I would have been forced to dismiss many of the expatriates' memories as inaccurate and useless. The pursuit of Truth also denies memory its complexities. Memories are representations of the past rather than the past itself. In his later work, Freud questioned whether there are ever authentic memories of the past, arguing that the process of remembrance always involves some distortion or re-writing of experience. Maurice Halbwachs' most famous

work focused on the issue of collective memory.⁶⁰ He maintained that memories are formed within and through *social frameworks* — social groups, social affiliations. In this sense, memories are collective, although it is the individual him/herself who must bear them. Memories become distorted within and through these social frameworks as well — not just within the individual's internal life. My study of the expatriates in Rabaul is predicated on the idea that memory is fluid and permeable and often contains fragments of fiction. Those memories that might have been dismissed by Peter Cohen as inaccurate remain a source of fascination to me: they reveal important details about the emotional life of an individual; and are valid as a source of information as much as facts and figures.

⁶⁰ See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992

Chapter Two

Thunder moves towards the mountain
Clouds press their sullen rain
Upon a sea frown-forming.
Stones and pumice stir
Uneasily with bones
Around cratered Rabaul...

— Excerpt, Anne McCosker, *New Guinea — My Country*¹

In late May 1937, over fifty years before the most recent eruption, Isabel Platten and her husband Gil, a Methodist minister, witnessed the *spectacularly awesome* display of Mt Vulcan rising out of Simpson Harbour. They had been preparing a wedding feast in Kabakada on the North Coast Road outside Rabaul when they noticed ‘how strange the earth tremors’ had become beneath their feet. Although the earth had been shaking with *gurias* for the past two days, it now seemed ‘constant and the verandah [on which the wedding feast had been laid] undulated. It was uncanny.’²

Later, as they attended the marriage ceremony between the headmaster of the College and his young fiancée, they suddenly heard ‘loud explosive noises’ in the distance:

Some thought it was thunder! Ceremony over and we moved outside and I said “Look at that strange cloud.” Then someone said, “That is not a cloud, that is an eruption”. Everyone stood still as the implications of this sank in. Then we all got into the cars and went down to the waterfront to get a good look. And I am glad we did, the risk was well worth the experience of seeing so spectacularly awesome an event of our planet. But as we gazed with uneasy eyes at a mountain of pumice ash pouring out of the sea we looked up and noticed the top part was already beginning to fall towards us. It was time to leave.

¹ See Anne McCosker, *New Guinea Waits: Three Articles on New Guinea*, London: Matala Publishing Company, 1993, pp27-28

² See Chilla Bulbeck, *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea: Colonial Passages 1920-1960*, pg35

....Our party got as far as Kabakada. The festive table, now covered with pumice dust, made a sad note. Soon it was pitch dark. The massive clouds of pumice had blotted out the sun. We got back into the cars, deciding to try to get to Vunairima, but we were not far along the road when we found it was impassable. Fronds from coconut trees and branches from other trees covered it completely. By now the friction of all this matter in the atmosphere was causing a terrific lightening storm over the volcano and spreading away from it. "Fireballs" danced among the coconut trees. The pumice was now wet, and had the consistency of wet cement. My main fear was that we would have an accident, such as broken bones, and no one could come to our aid.

But people did come to aid us over the debris. Quite suddenly I felt a hand on my arm and was being guided firmly, but gently, over the littered road. Nearby village natives, hearing us struggling along the road, had come to help us. The gentle hand gave me the sense of security I needed. We passed out from fallen trees on to clear road and were soon at Vunairima....We could not see ourselves, we didn't need to; we looked as though we were cast in cement and only two red eyes peered through all the greyness.³

The next day, Isabel was shocked by the devastation around her:

Gone were the lawns and flowers, and trees were leafless. What we saw was a stark land seemingly cast in cement.....It was horrible....With sadness we heard many hundreds of natives had died; many had gone into a church — all were buried.

However, she soon found consolation for her sadness in the rapid regeneration of the landscape: it wasn't 'long before the rains washed away the worst of the grime and soon the lawns grew again; leaves were on our trees and flowers blossomed more beautifully than ever.'

Isabel wrote down her memories of the 1937 eruption in the form of several letters to Chilla Bulbeck, her grand-daughter. They appear in a book by Bulbeck based on the lives of nineteen expatriate women in colonial New Guinea.⁴

Titled *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea: Colonial Passages 1920-1960*, Bulbeck's study positions the experiences of Isabel and other European women against a backdrop of official colonial affairs and ideologies — emphasising their

³ *Ibid*, pp35-36

⁴ *Ibid*

delicate negotiation of and responses to, the larger colonial project.⁵ Influenced by a body of feminist scholarship that places ‘new inflection’ on the role of white women in colonial Africa, India and Fiji,⁶ Bulbeck presents an intimate, unique story.⁷ Her history is based on small details captured in a myriad of letters, diaries and travelogues written at different times during the colonial period, in response to different circumstances. It proceeds from the personal to the general, centering women’s lives within an historical period and process that has often sought to marginalise them.

Of interest to Bulbeck in her opening chapter are women’s reflections on the passage from Australia to New Guinea; she explores their early impressions and investigations of the landscape of the colony.⁸ Many of the women in her study had been nurtured on mission literature or tropical romances, travelogues or scientific treatises before embarking on the journey overseas.⁹ Some had read the romances of Beatrice Grimshaw, a British writer who lived in Papua between 1907 and 1934. In Grimshaw’s writings, the Papuan environment was often described in terms of its radical otherness to the environment back home; like many other colonial fictions set in the outposts of the British Empire — such as those of Rudyard Kipling and Rider Haggard — this otherness was often defined in terms of female savagery and allure.¹⁰ Grimshaw ‘more often than not saw Papua as defeating those who would conquer her: “a woman, dark and savage,

⁵ *Ibid*, pg3

⁶ *Ibid*, pg2. See also Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji 1835-1930: the Ruin of Empire?* Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986; Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria*, Basingstoke and London: The MacMillan Press in association with St Anthony’s, Oxford, 1987

⁷ Chilla Bulbeck, *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea*, op cit, pg3

⁸ *Ibid*, pp7-38

⁹ *Ibid*, pg26

with cruel beautiful eyes and bloodstained mouth.’”¹¹ Bulbeck maintains that within the colonial imagination New Guinea possessed the

dangerous allure of the alien where rules are not always known, and where both the inhabitants and the astounding scenery serve as mechanisms for a plot that reinforces white domination and sexual temptation. Expatriate women sometimes alluded to this register, their breath taken away by astonishing scenery or frightening experiences, or their privileged position as witnesses of unique times.¹²

The otherness of the tropics of New Guinea was sometimes a *terrible beauty* inspiring ‘both fear and fascination’ in European women.¹³ The stories of the nineteen women often emphasised ‘the fickleness of this beauty; they lived through volcanoes, earthquakes, snake bites from death adders, potential blindness from the poison of millipedes, and crawling logs thrown across flooded rivers’.¹⁴ Isabel Platten bore witness to the tempestuousness of Rabaul’s beauty. As the rains washed away the pumice and ash from the hills surrounding the town, trees and shrubs began to flourish again and the expatriates could celebrate the renewal of life through the Frangipani Ball.

Rabaul (originally called Simpsonhafen) was established by the Germans in 1906 and became the capital of the German administration in 1910. It acquired its name from the mangroves, *baul* in the Tolai language, which once grew around the northern shores of Simpson harbour.¹⁵ In contemporary parlance the term *Rabaul* is used by expatriates to describe only the town itself, among the Tolai, however, the term has an extended meaning, referring ‘to the northeastern Gazelle

¹⁰Ibid, pg34

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid, pg37

¹³Ibid, pg34

¹⁴Ibid

¹⁵ See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg2

Peninsula, Tolai country.¹⁶ Germany's Melanesian territory, known as the Protectorate of the New Guinea Company, was acquired in 1884.¹⁷ At this time, it consisted of the north-east mainland New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago, comprising the islands of New Britain, New Ireland, New Hanover and Manus. Between 1886 and 1889, the territory was extended to include the islands of Bougainville, Buka, Choiseul, Santa Isabel and the Northern Solomons atolls as far as Ontong Java.¹⁸ In the Anglo-German treaty of 1899, the Germans relinquished some of these islands to Britain, including Buka and Bougainville. The German administration was largely a 'maritime colony' — based in coastal areas. Much of the terrain of New Britain and Bougainville was difficult to traverse at this time; the German's primary interest in the Protectorate was to generate capital by establishing plantations and trade in the region.¹⁹

Herbertshöhe was the capital of the German administration until 1910. It was later renamed Kokopo. It has been maintained that

Rabaul was built to last. Its wide avenues were planted with tropical shade trees; there were sturdy timber houses set in sweeping gardens, an impressive Government House high on Namanula Hill, and well planned facilities like a hospital, wharf and Botanical Gardens, developed by Richard Parkinson. Everything was adopted to tropical conditions and designed to meet the exacting standards of the able Governor Dr Albert Hahl. Permanent government stations at strategic locations like Kavieng in New Ireland and Kieta on Bougainville were built on smaller scale but to similar high standards.²⁰

In the Great War of 1914-18, the Germans lost their New Guinea territory to the Australians — their plantations formally expropriated. Rabaul became the capital of the new Australian colony known as the Mandated Territory. In the period

¹⁶*Ibid*, pg1

¹⁷See Stewart Firth, *New Guinea Under the Germans*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1982, pp1-6

¹⁸*Ibid*, pg1

¹⁹*Ibid*, pg 4

between the two wars, it 'developed a way of life that other Australians found strange. It was the town where government officers wore white suits, and black servants prepared baths and trimmed neat lawns. Well-known rules regulated all meetings between Europeans, Asians and New Guineans.'²¹

Jan Robert's *Voices from a Lost World* also focuses on the life and experiences of women in Papua New Guinea.²² She argues that between the war years, Rabaul was a 'planned paradise.'²³ Maps of the town at this time (such as a pre-War 1942 map featured in Pat Boys' *Coconuts and Tearooms*) depicted a township laid out in ordered, grid-like formation.²⁴ China Town and the Botanic Reserve were located towards the northern perimeters of the town; 'native land' was situated towards the south-east. Although Rabaul represented 'civilisation to white New Guinea residents,' it was always sinister in *nature*.²⁵ Hildur McNicoll, who lived in Rabaul as the Administrator's wife from 1934 onwards, always felt that Rabaul was 'sinister, but beautiful.' 'The faint sulphur smell [of the volcanoes], light wreaths of smoke from Matupi and frequent earth tremors or *gurias* were unnerving'.²⁶ Rabaul was a beautiful place to inhabit; as Isabel Platten had discovered first hand, potential violence and danger always lurked beneath its well-manicured lawns and gardens.

Following the Second World War, the town was rebuilt in its original grid-like

²⁰ See Jan Roberts, *Voices from a Lost World*, op cit, pg 122

²¹ See Hank Nelson, *Taim bilong Masta: the Australian Involvement in Papua New Guinea*, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, pg88

²² See Jan Roberts, *Voices from a Lost World*, op cit

²³ *Ibid*, pg122

²⁴ See Pat Boys, *Coconuts and Tearooms: Six Years in New Britain, New Guinea in the 1930s: The Colonial Days*, Auckland: privately published, 1993, pp8-9

²⁵ Jan Roberts, *Voices from a Lost World*, op cit, pg175

²⁶ *Ibid*, pg181

formation. Following the 1994 eruption, there was still some evidence of this town-planning, but overall the structure has been lost: boundaries between properties are now unclear and are, in some cases, the subject of dispute following the destruction of the Land Titles Register during the eruption.²⁷ Peter Read maintains that peoples' perceptions of place and environment are created within and through cultural frameworks and identifications — that 'nature ha[s] first to be conceptualised as a place before it [can] be loved;' before feelings of attachment can be ascribed to it.²⁸ The recognition of a mountain like Vulcan as a volcanic formation — as a nameable geographical entity — is 'a cultural, not a natural, expression.'²⁹ People tend to 'respond individually to locality.. and the culture with which they are familiar helps to enlarge, diminish, shape or transform it.'³⁰ Many of the women featured in Roberts and Bulbeck's stories responded *individually to the locality* of Rabaul. However, by applying the term *Rabaul* to only the town itself (rather than to the whole of the northeastern Gazelle Peninsula), they positioned themselves within particular histories and colonial identifications. Rabaul has never been a Tolai town; during the colonial era, it was very much an expatriate town, a construct of the colonial imagination. The colonists were a central presence in the Rabaul of their imagining; Papua New Guineans and Chinese lived on the peripheries, in [an]other place within that imagination.

This chapter focuses on expatriate memories of the landscape of Rabaul before the

²⁷ In fact, Robert Cohen, an Australian working as the Auditor of the Gazelle Restoration Authority, is trying to get hold of old Australian patrol reports to assist in resolving land disputes. Many patrol reports gave detailed information about genealogies and traditional land ownership.

²⁸ See Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing*, op cit, pg3

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp3-4

³⁰ *Ibid*, pg3

eruption — providing a framework in which to understand my final chapter, which explores expatriate feelings of loss and sadness towards the post-eruption landscape. In the first section, I reflect on the ways in which the expatriates were both awed and disquietened by Rabaul's natural beauty — ascribing personal meanings to it in much the same way as the women featured in Roberts and Bulbeck's stories. In the second and third sections, I focus on the process of remembering itself, looking at how frameworks of the present inform expatriate identifications with the past. In so doing, I draw on the themes of alienation, nostalgia and memory addressed in the previous chapter.

NEW GUINEA ROMANCES

When I interviewed him in 1995, John Beagley lived in Kavieng, New Ireland, in a small cabin off a road made of ground coral. A big, flamboyant man in his sixties, he had spent most of his adult life in Papua New Guinea living in Arawa on the northeastern side of Bougainville. He left there in 1990 to escape the civil war. In Bougainville, he had taught English and History; in his retirement in Kavieng, he managed a studio employing young Papua New Guinean men to paint decorative indigenous motifs on to t-shirts. He was also a writer; parts of a diary he maintained during the eruption have been published in *Paradise*, the inflight magazine of the Papua New Guinean airline, Air Niugini.³¹ He had just returned to Papua New Guinea in December 1995 following eight months of treatment for a serious illness in Australia.

John Beagley lived in Rabaul from 1990 until the volcano erupted — managing

³¹See Georgie McKie and John Beagley, 'Diary of a Disaster,' *Paradise*, No. 109, Mar-Apr 1995,

his t-shirt business, *Studio Kalakala*, in a mall attached to the Travelodge motel on Malaguna Avenue.

John remembered with pleasure the mountains surrounding Simpson harbour.

These mountains made him feel

at *home* because Bougainville was home to me after twenty years. And the mountains in Bougainville — I don't know if you have been there — people say that it's one of the only places in the Pacific that's like Tahiti: where the mountains come straight down almost to the sea with a very short plain. And there's the sea. So each morning for twenty years I woke up and saw the Crown Prince Range and in Rabaul, having that house in Malay Town, I looked straight out and saw Mother. So to other people it might have been a mountain but to me it was like home.

Mother is also known as Mt Kombiu — it was given its affectionate moniker by the English explorer and navigator Phillip Carteret in 1767. Carteret also named the mountains near her South Daughter and North Daughter; the Father mountain (Mt Ulawan) 'doesn't live at Rabaul with his family but in a place of his own up the coast.'³²

Even though John lived in Rabaul for five years, he always remembered his early impressions of the place:

The first impressions were always the same for me. I couldn't believe that there was such a beautiful place as this. With the harbour, the volcanoes; the coconut trees are absolutely marvellous. And it was always the same for me in those five years I stayed there: I could not believe I was living in such a beautiful place....

He was a bit *traumo* when he first arrived in Rabaul on a small boat from Bougainville: he 'had stayed too long [on the island]: there were bullets rushing past the house, there were road blocks. People would come into the house with guns...' Rabaul was like a *salve*. As soon as he arrived, he caught up with friends he had known in Bougainville who immediately took him up Namanula Hill to the

Observatory. He could see the whole of the town from the Observatory; after ‘seeing all the things and buildings I love in Bougainville being smashed and burned down, I thought, *Here’s a town that hasn’t been touched...*’ Rabaul was a place of salvation; the closest place to *home* — carrying the ‘illusion of familiarity’ (the mountains) while offering the ‘illusion of protection’ (peace).³³

However, despite his love for Rabaul’s natural beauty, he was well aware of its potential violence — having read and taken an interest in the history of the area. Although Mt Tavurvur is the smallest of the mountains around Simpson Harbour, he always felt that it looked

naughty as if it were likely to do something....There were stories of people going up there and there was a colourless gas and six Sepiks went up there to poke for Megapode eggs and they weren’t supposed to be there — a certain Tolai clan can go there and get them. So there were stories about the poisonous gas that got them...These are all stories that added to the naughtiness of the thing....like a tropical ulcer... Vulcan was smoothed over, the Mother was smoothed over but Matupit looked as if were a little trouble-maker to me.

While John felt awed by Rabaul’s beauty, it also disquietened him — giving his life an edge.

John first came to Papua New Guinea in 1963. He arrived in Wewak on the Papua New Guinean mainland where he spent time learning *Tok Pisin* from the villagers with whom he used to play sport and chew betel nut. These activities ostracised him from the other expatriates who liked to maintain a *colonial distance* from the *natives*. He came to Papua New Guinea because he had learned about it at school: images of villages in the Highlands and men going out in canoes to fish appealed to his imagination and sense of romance: they seemed so removed from his own

³² Jan Roberts quoting Marnie Masson, *Voices from a Lost World*, op cit, pg121

³³Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing*, op cit, pg2

experiences growing up in Manly in Sydney. Despite the hardships he had endured in Papua New Guinea — war, a volcano, serious ill-health — he did not want to return to Australia. However, he was not happy in Kavieng in 1995 and in fact returned to Rabaul in the following year (1996). There are no mountains around Kavieng; there were few reminders of home; John also did not like the general atmosphere of the place: the band of expatriates living in town are smaller and vulnerable to rascal attacks. A single image in John's memory contained a plethora of voices and longings. Dissatisfaction with his situation in 1995 made him yearn for Rabaul, speak of it with homesickness. He felt restless and uneasy in Kavieng — less protected by a strong expatriate community.

The Vunapope Mission stands on a hill overlooking the blue-green sea beyond Kokopo. It consists of a hospital (which has become the major hospital of the region since the eruption. Nonga Hospital, situated in Nonga towards the northern outskirts of Rabaul, was significantly vandalised in the aftermaths of the volcano by looters.) The Mission also operates a school for nursing students as well as a girls' high school. It is run by both expatriate and Papua New Guinean Sisters; and expatriate Fathers and Papua New Guinean Brothers. Vunapope means 'the place of the Pope'; it was established in 1882 by three missionaries of the Sacred Heart, who landed at Matupit Island before proceeding to Nodup, and then Kiningunan. The Sacred Heart is a Roman Catholic order whose international headquarters were in Rome, although most of its missionaries have been German.³⁴ The Methodist missionaries settled in the region at about the same time as the

³⁴ See R. W. Johnson and N. A. Threlfall, *Volcano Town: The 1937 - 43 Rabaul Eruptions*, op cit, pg10

Catholics. The 'colonial government divided the Gazelle Peninsula between the two rival missions, with the result that today some areas are exclusively Catholics and some exclusively serviced by the Uniting Church, which succeeded the Methodist Mission.'³⁵ Neville Threlfall has argued that in the early years, these two missionary organisations competed against one another for the salvation of Tolai souls.³⁶

Sister Shirley is an Australian Sacred Heart missionary who worked as a teacher at the girls' high school at Vunapope in 1995. I talked to her at the Mission in a small open wind house in the garden just below the Convent. She was a small woman, very vibrant, near retirement age, musing over her memories of life in Papua New Guinea. She first arrived in Milne Bay on the mainland of Papua New Guinea in 1959 where she stayed for twelve months, teaching primary school children. She then moved to a mission station at Rossel island located about a day's boat ride from Nimoa where she had begun her missionary work. She spent seventeen years there before receiving notification from the education authorities just prior to Independence that her services as a primary teacher were no longer needed; positions were being localised. And so she upgraded to high-school teaching while in Australia for two years and returned to Milne Bay where she spent a further three years in the late 1970s.

During the 1950s, Sister Shirley heard marvellous tales about the challenges faced by early missionary sisters serving in Papua and New Guinea. The 'hardships of

³⁵Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg6

³⁶ See Neville Threlfall, *One Hundred Years in the Islands: The Methodist/United Church in the New Guinea Islands Region, 1875 - 1975*, Rabaul, The United Church, New Guinea Islands, 1975, pp59-60

that life' appealed to her: 'Stuck out on an island, we only got mail every two months when the boat came. There was something very challenging about it.' As a young missionary sister, she had been offered the choice of going to the Northern Territory, the Gilbert Islands or Papua New Guinea: she chose the latter because she felt she needed *something real missionary*.

She has been living at the Mission since 1989; she taught English to Grade Ten girls at the girls' high school there. Like John Beagley, she had always found Rabaul naturally beautiful:

The physical beauty. Coming up the main street, you had the huge mountains: *so majestic*. Glorious and here was this little town right in the middle of the volcano — and an active one at that! So crazy! You thought, "Why did they ever build it?" But when you lived there it was so beautiful. And the sea all around you...

When she first arrived in the town, she was surprised by its size:

I felt it was a very little town. I had heard about Rabaul for many, many years — the Chinese stores and everything else — so I was quite surprised when it was a one street shopping centre. It was very easy to find your way around but then as I moved further up into Malaytown, there were lots of Chinese stores. Fairly orderly: you could find your way around. Most of the Chinese stores were together up around Malaytown — not too many of them around the Mango Avenue area. They were more on the sidelines — the side streets.

BPs and Steamships were the big trading stores; then the bank and the police station. And the Chinese stores that dealt in every kind of good: just popped up here and there and then they expanded....

I was a bit disappointed in so far as I thought, *Oh, I thought Rabaul was one of the big shopping centres and here there are just little trade stores that you find anywhere in Papua New Guinea...*

However, it was the sea around Rabaul that captured her imagination. She grew up in a little township in the Western district of Victoria where her father worked as a fisherman. 'I've always loved the sea,' she said; 'there's something about it... All the missions I've come to have been right on the waterline.' 'I suppose it was the sea and the islands [that made the greatest impression on me to begin with.]' She used

to drive to Rabaul every Wednesday to replenish groceries for the school canteen. This was an enjoyable trip because she always took the Kokopo road. This road journeys past the Blue Lagoon, a small inlet where the water is the deepest of blue-greens, reflecting a myriad of tropical colours. She loved the flowers: 'the people take a lot of pride in their gardens and it's always Bougainvillea, hibiscus, bananas.' She had a particular love for the sea because it reminded her of her childhood home in Victoria.

Although Sister Shirley found Rabaul a 'happy, joyful place', she always felt uneasy about Tavurvur:

We went up there on an excursion about three months before the eruption. The smell was shocking and I got as far as the top but by that time the sulphur was making me head-achey and sick.

It was a desolate, barren place because a lot of the vegetation had burned up. Without being aware of it, it was burning all the time. And then you'd suddenly notice it: that there was a lot more vegetation burning up. You noticed little things like that. It wasn't attractive — interesting but not attractive like the other mountains around Rabaul.

Like John Beagley, she always felt that Rabaul's volcanoes, while beautiful, were capable of immense destruction. She felt uneasy and disquietened by them.

David Loh, as President of the East New Britain Chamber of Commerce in 1995, was instrumental in trying to re-establish Rabaul town following the eruption. Trained as a horticulturalist in Australia, he has lived in Rabaul since 1970; prior to that he was in Goroka (1961-1967) and Popondetta (1967-1970).

From 1970 to 1990, David was the Manager at the Lower Lands Agricultural and Experimental Station (LAES). LAES is located near Kerevat, a settlement to the south-west of Rabaul. From there, he moved to Rabaul, becoming the Executive

Director for the Papua New Guinea Growers' Association. In 1992, he bought the New Britain Lodge 'with the idea of going into retirement.' A year later, he retired from the Association to run the Lodge on a part-time basis.

David had strong links with the Tolai community; with the exception of just one other expatriate — Robert Cohen — he was the only European I met who could speak *Kuanua* fluently. Prior to the eruption, David took full advantage of the beauty and sites of Rabaul: sometimes he enjoyed a champagne breakfast on the summit of Mt Kombiu. For 25 Kina (approximately \$AU 25.00), he would be flown up there by helicopter, spending two to three hours before a *magnificent view* sipping chilled champagne. 'You'd see the Duke of Yorks that way and all around here [from the summit]', he said. He remembered with pride the garden he had established in the grounds of the Lodge. He would often sip 'gin and tonics in a hammock' there. The grounds also contained a zoo:

I had two or three different types of possums and tree kangaroos, parrots, crocodiles, and it was in a big walk-in aviary that all the guests used to like. And I built this big tropical garden with a waterfall and running water and I lit the whole place up with sixteen thousand lights...at night it looked like something out of Disney Land.

The memory of the fairy lights gave David obvious pleasure. What continued to unsettle him, however, was the destructive potential of Mother mountain. Pointing towards the mountain from the room in which we were talking one day, he said,

this mountain is potentially dangerous. In fact they thought it blew up [back in '94]...That could blow any time, right there, and I mean that would wipe everything out!

John, Sister Shirley and David felt a mixture of *pleasure* and *disquiet* for Rabaul's natural beauty in those years before the eruption. Their concept of beauty reflected personal associations and longings made meaningful within certain cultural

frameworks and experiences. In the case of John, Rabaul's beauty had become part of the fabric of the past. During the eruption, he evacuated first to Port Moresby and then later to Kavieng. In 1995, the Rabaul of his memory had become a place of imagining — a *home* from which he had been displaced.³⁷

RADICAL DISCONTINUITIES

In her poem, *New Guinea — My Country*, Anne McCosker writes with ache and longing for Rabaul, adopting the imaginary persona of a Papua New Guinean woman. Who really cares/ About this *nowhere land*,³⁸ she writes,

This elemental earth
Of energetic passion.
It is used, abused
Made plaything

Yet this, my country, is "nowhere land,"
She has the right to choose
Her destiny
Rise from her roots
Know her past unhindered
By lies masked out as learning.....

Thunder moves towards the mountain
Lightening drags the sky
Into feverish shade.
A figure pauses, squats,
Medium of movement
Around the tribal hearth. ³⁸

She includes this poem in a series of three articles critiquing Chilla Bulbeck's writings on Australian women in Papua New Guinea. In these articles and in the poems she has published elsewhere, she expresses a nostalgia and yearning for her life back in Rabaul that appears displaced in time and place, hovering like an unresolved ache within her. Born in Rabaul in 1940, reared on the Matala

³⁷Papua New Guineans also thought of Rabaul as beautiful. See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg1; pp 163-166

³⁸See Anne McCosker, 'New Guinea - My Country', *New Guinea Waits: Three Articles on New*

plantation *fifty miles south of Rabaul*, her childhood was dominated by New Guinea, even after she left to attend school in Queensland.

Eva Hoffman argues that 'emigration, as of any radical discontinuity, ...makes... rereadings [of the past] difficult,' encouraging either *nostalgia* (which is an 'ineffectual relationship to the past') or *alienation* (which is 'an ineffectual relationship to the present').³⁹ Anne McCosker lives away from New Guinea. She writes her poems in London. She has experienced the type of rupture within her life which is the central theme of Hoffman's autobiography. She cannot return to her childhood spent in New Guinea; it is a discrete period in her life which is over. Her poems have a lonely, sparse and sad quality about them — a compulsive passion that cannot be assuaged through time.

The 1994 eruption also caused a radical discontinuity within the lives of the expatriates. In this section, I begin to explore expatriate feelings of alienation, sadness and nostalgia towards the natural environment of pre-eruption Rabaul, elaborating on themes which will be taken up in more detail in my final chapter.

John remembered with pleasure and nostalgia the unique smells of Rabaul. As a newcomer to town,

you would smell *buai* [betel nut], you'd smell that smoky smell from village fires, and that has all become second nature to me... I have written poetry about Papua New Guinea — even the pheromones of the lorikeet — but all that is no longer exotic to me. It's what I expect and if it's not there, I die. So it's subliminal with me... if I go away from it, and I'm in Australia, and I don't smell *buai*, don't smell the *kaukau* [sweet potato] cooking, it drives me cuckoo. I know that I'm missing out; the smells are not the same...Smell wouldn't play a big part in my description of Rabaul, but it's a big part of my life...It's not something you think about except in the quiet times when you are writing poetry...

Guinea, op cit, pp27-28

³⁹See Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, op cit, pg242

Describing some of these smells in detail, he remarked,

There's a funny sort of smell that gets into coconuts too if you go through coconut plantations and it sort of wafts on the breeze and you smell it. It doesn't happen in Australia. It's like a mouldy smell...Even the marine smell that you get around wharves — there's a different smell about marine things in temperate climates than there is the tropics...The water is very saline here; it might be [that.]

John's comments about the distinctiveness of the smells of Rabaul are mirrored by Kay Poole, a resident of Rabaul in the 1950s. Poole was also fascinated by the different types of smells encountered in the town. In an article she wrote for the *Pacific Islands Monthly* in August of 1953, she maintained that

Rabaul may be primitive in patches, but it has charm and colour, and it is arguable that colour to the mind is the result of a variety of smells combined with visual impressions. Nostalgic memories of the gorgeous East are almost inseparable from stink. Memories of post-War Rabaul pleasantly combine frangipani, wet grass after rain, the salt sea smell of the harbour, an overtone of beer and sulphur fumes and dust, incense and mildew from Chinatown (with an occasional acrid undertone of drains) the fresh, clear coolness of morning at first light; the strong scent of wharves slippery with copra, and the aromatic warm smell of the lovely tree-lined Kokopo road by moonlight, where the fireflies flash their brilliant fairytale signals....

Most of us coming back from leave have scrambled ashore from a dinghy somewhere on the way home, or landed on a tumbledown rickety wharf, where a few old coconuts and bits of driftwood and pumice are bobbing on the ride, and taken a deep breath of copra, and mildew and something unidentifiable which is possibly not quite clean, and suddenly with an indescribable thankfulness known that we were back in the islands...⁴⁰

Smell are passages between the memories of the past and the experiences of the present. As Proust noted in a luminous passage from *Swann's Way*, smell and taste alone are 'more fragile but more enduring, more insubstantial, more persistent, more faithful...amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.'⁴¹

Smells stirred strong feelings in John. As C. Nadia Seremetakis has noted, senses

⁴⁰ Kay Poole, 'In Defence of Bods and Smells', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, Aug 1953, pp65-66

⁴¹ Quoted from Jeffrey Masson, *Dogs never lie about Love: Reflections on the Emotional World of Dogs*, London: Vintage, 1998, pg190

‘are entangled with history, memory, forgetfulness, narrative and silence.’⁴² When John was away from the islands, he experienced a *nostalgia of the senses*: the ‘sensory dimension of memory in exile.’⁴³

John maintained that sounds were also an important aspect of life in pre-eruption Rabaul:

Shuffle, shuffle, hawk and spit: that’s what you hear. People shuffling with their thongs, and spitting. You will hear that if you walk along. That’s not rude; that’s part of Papua New Guinea.

There is a peculiar rumble you get in Rabaul. I think the ground is porous — it’s made of coral — and if a truck goes along Mango Avenue, you can feel the truck moving like an earthquake and there’s a peculiar sort of hollow rumbling sound with huge vehicles. Now I don’t know whether other people have mentioned it or not, but I found that I really didn’t hear that at home [Bougainville]....I’m not talking of a sound that’s on top, crunching under tyres, but underneath. The ground moves and you know that you’re not on something that is solid...

The thing that I remember about Rabaul is that everything sounded louder than it ever had at home. The flying foxes in Rabaul have to be the *noisiest* flying foxes I have ever heard. It could be that there was a huge mango tree outside my window and also a guava tree! But the sounds of the insects in Rabaul seemed louder than I had ever heard before — whether in Sydney or in Bougainville. Whether the air is crisp or something and the sound travels, I don’t know....

John frequently travelled along the Burma Road — up and over the mountains above Rabaul towards the Kerevat Country Club where he would drink and socialise with friends. He regrets that after a while, he took the beauty of the trip for granted. He would turn towards the person who was driving, become distracted by chatter, which was ‘crazy because you *should* be watching...’

When he was not talking to the driver, he would always pay attention to a particular bend on the road just before

you come down the hill [towards town]. [At this bend], you had the whole harbour looking at you. And at night time it was absolutely stunning...At certain times there

⁴²C. Nadia Seremetakis, ‘The Memory of the Senses, Part 1: Marks of the Transitory,’ in C. Nadia Seremetakis (ed), *The Senses Still*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, pg2

⁴³*Ibid*, pg4

are certain sunsets....we'd come from the Kerevat Club and you'd turn that corner and suddenly there was the harbour and you can see the Beehive rocks...

When John spoke about the colours, smells and sounds of Rabaul, he spoke with regret and sadness for experiences relegated to the past. His nostalgia was experienced primarily as a feeling of loss, as an unassuageable absence in the present. It is significant that the smells of Rabaul came back to him when he was writing creatively. He could indulge his imagination in writing. Writing was a source of pleasure for him, a respite from ongoing feelings of disenchantment towards Kavieng.

However, Sister Shirley, David Loh and Ewen Fenwick did not maintain nostalgia for the smells of pre-eruption Rabaul. Sister Shirley remembered the sweet smells of frangipani with only fleeting pleasure; David remembered Rabaul's smells only in relation to those of other centres like Goroka and Port Moresby (its smells were less sour). Ewen Fenwick, who was born in Rabaul in 1953 could not recall any specific smell. He did not think of himself as a *flower person* and was only aware of the sulphur smell emanating from Tavurvur because visitors sometimes commented on it.

Smell can be a defining feature of an individual's memories and experiences. In the case of David, Sister Shirley, and Ewen, however, it was only a fleeting and marginal aspect of their past and present circumstances. The fact that they experienced smell in this way reveals something about the relationship between memory and its objects. The paradox of memory is that it often remembers best what is most unfamiliar, what has become exceptional in the moment of its passing or absence. David, Sister Shirley, and Ewen continued to reside around

Rabaul following the eruption; unlike John, they have not experienced prolonged physical separation from the region. They forgot the smells of pre-eruption Rabaul because these smells were still familiar, were too familiar to be remembered. John, on the other hand, remembered the smells of Rabaul because they had become unfamiliar. John's reflections on the nature of smell became the basis for articulating feelings of sorrow and displacement in the present.

THE FORGETTING OF A MOUNTAIN

When Vulcan erupted in 1878, it produced large amounts of pumice (porous stone) which drifted south-eastwards on the surface of the sea, causing the passage between New Britain and the Duke of York islands to close.⁴⁴ Its surrounding seafloor rose during the 1937 eruption; fringing reef became visible; and several islets also appeared.⁴⁵

Before the eruption, some expatriates were unaware of Vulcan's location in the landscape around Rabaul. Those who were aware of its position along the Kokopo Road were aware of its history. Ewen maintained that

Vulcan's always been Vulcan. It's always been a volcano. It's always been a mountain that rose out of a gap between an island and the coast in '37. It claimed a lot of lives...it was always part of my growing up. Vulcan was the mountain that did all the damage in '37.

Without an awareness of that history, Vulcan would have simply been 'a well-covered [hill], part of the harbour scene.'

John maintained that it was difficult to see the mountain from the road:

⁴⁴ See R.W. Johnson and N.A. Threlfall, *Volcano Town*, op cit, pg26

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pg19

When I drove past, I'd have to ask people, *Are we going around Vulcan yet or not?* You could see it when you were away from it...It really annoyed me [that I couldn't see it] because I knew I was near it and I wanted to know where this ancient thing was...I read all the reports on what it did in 1937...

Sister Shirley also had problems locating it:

I must admit I never noticed Vulcan much. Because there was so much greenery everywhere. And when Vulcan blew, I sort of sat back and thought, *Where's Vulcan?* It was just another hill. Just covered with grass and greens and vegetables. It had a lot of cash crops growing on it: watermelons growing inside it. It was just another garden on the side of the hill. And I was very disappointed that I hadn't taken more notice of Vulcan because four or five years went past and I hardly noticed it.

Sister Shirley maintained that 'we knew it came out of the sea, but we thought, *Oh well, there's no smoke coming out of it.* We saw little wisps of smoke coming out of Tavurvur. [Vulcan] was just another hill; we never thought of it being alive.'

Sister Shirley said, *We knew it came out of the sea, but...* This *we* is significant. It seems that an awareness of Vulcan as a mountain presupposed being in a community in which that awareness was being constantly reaffirmed: collective memories are most sustainable in communities that retain a semblance of continuity. The fact that the expatriate community was slowly disintegrating meant that its memories were being lost. Memories lost included an awareness of Vulcan's precise location along the Kokopo Road.

Tolai survivors of the 1937 eruption accurately identified the early warning signs of the 1994 eruption: stories about the 1937 eruption still circulated throughout the Tolai community. Most expatriates had limited social contact with Tolais before the eruption. They were not part of the culture and memory frameworks in which these stories circulated. Had they been, they might still have been able to distinguish Vulcan from the trees.

Expatriate memories of the landscape of pre-eruption Rabaul were shaped by personal identification and by larger structures of knowledge, awareness and silence. Peter Read has maintained that 'we pour so much of ourselves into our houses, suburbs, towns and landscapes that they not only represent our lives, they become our lives.'⁴⁶ In the case of an expatriate like John Beagley, the landscape of Rabaul had become his home and life. By talking about the natural beauty of Rabaul, he was also talking about himself — creating a picture of a life that in recent times, had been filled with tremendous sorrow and upheaval. Memory is a curious distance: removed from the present through time, it creates the illusion of continuity with the past even as it irrevocably severs that continuity.

⁴⁶See Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing*, op cit, back cover

Chapter Three

In 1968, Tim Wilson began working as an overseer on a plantation outside Rabaul run and owned by Burns Philp ['BPs'], an islands trading and shipping firm.¹ Prior to arriving in the islands, he had worked as a jackeroo on the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland. It was only after drought hit the Cape that he decided to apply for a position in New Guinea.

The plantation life in Rabaul could not have been more different to the hard yakka of jackarooing in drought-stricken Northern Queensland. The plantation on which Tim worked and lived was situated outside Kokopo. Rabaul was *absolutely magic*, green and lush in comparison to the Cape.

At that time, the expatriate community in town was still *very colonial*:

It struck me that it was the kind of place I would like because of the way it was run. Everything was done properly. It was a very clean town. Impressive: big trees down the middle of the street. People road bicycles in those days. Eventually I bought a little motorbike. We lived like kings; everybody did. It was just *that good*. I was on the Kokopo side. A beautiful trip from Rabaul to Kokopo. We were on a plantation out there. I've never looked back: that was the luckiest decision I ever made: to come up here. Especially from the drought and desolation I had left behind in the northern areas of Australia...

I've never been able to say enough about the Tolais. We were very readily accepted by them out there, although there wasn't much social contact in those days. But we were not only isolated from them, but also from our own peers. The European expatriate group were certainly segregated: there were clubs and places in this town where I could not go. There were the older elite who could go to the clubs; but we [overseers] were regarded as riffraff.

In 1969 Tim moved to the west coast of New Ireland to oversee another plantation. In 1972, he moved to Bougainville where he eventually became a plantation manager and married. He moved back to Rabaul in 1985, living in a

¹ For additional information on Burns Philp in the islands, see D. C Lewis, *The Plantation Dream: Developing British New Guinea and Papua, 1884-1942*, Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History,

house near Sulphur Creek, towards Tavurvur and the old airport. He bought the Rabaul Coffee Shop on Mango Avenue, managing it until it was destroyed by the eruption.

Tim and his expatriate colleagues lived like *kings* on the plantation outside Kokopo despite the fact that the social and political fabric of the Gazelle was undergoing significant change at that time. Papua New Guinea was only four years away from self-government and only six years away from outright independence from Australia.

In the year that Tim left the Gazelle, 'the longest, most intransigent, and best organised opposition that Australia encountered in Papua New Guinea' began in the Gazelle Peninsula, continuing until the 1972 general election.² Towards the end of the 1960s, there were approximately one hundred and fifty local councils across Papua New Guinea, of which three quarters were multi-racial.³ The Gazelle local council was exclusively Papua New Guinean elected and governed. When, after some deliberation and consultation, the council was proclaimed multi-racial, the Tolai-organised Mataungan Association began a campaign of dissent, culminating in arrests, some violence and a refusal to pay taxes unless the council retained exclusive Papua New Guinean membership. This dissent attracted interest from the Australian media and was later the subject of a Commission of Inquiry.⁴

Land pressures had long been a problem on the Gazelle; a significant percentage of land had been alienated during the German administration and had not been

1996, pg17; pp 33-34.

² See Don Woolford, *Papua New Guinea: Initiation and Independence*, University of Queensland, 1976, pp43-67

³ *Ibid*, pg45

automatically returned to Papua New Guineans when the Australians took possession. In 1970, the Australian administration attempted to relieve land shortage in the Gazelle by making 15,000 acres known as Vunapaladig available to Tolai settlers. The Mataungan Association immediately claimed the land; dissent in the region escalated once again as demonstrations and physical confrontations took place with police and Administration officials opposed to Mataungan occupation of the land. However, the event that unsettled the Australian administration most was the murder of Jack Emmanuel, the District Commissioner. Emmanuel had served the region for many years, spoke *Kuanua*, and was 'regarded as having a special place in Tolai affection.'⁵ On 19 August, he had been mediating a land dispute on a plantation at Kabaira Bay when, after talking to several villagers, he walked down a path away from the village to speak to another man.⁶ Police later found his body. He had been stabbed with a bayonet. Some accused the Mataungan Association of his murder, although its involvement has never been established.

In 1970, Gough Whitlam, the Opposition leader of the Australian Labor Party toured the Gazelle and told Papua New Guineans that he would grant independence to Papua New Guinea if Labor won the 1972 Federal election (as he anticipated and as proved the case). Six months later, John Gorton, the Prime Minister of Australia, 'announced the transfer of significant powers from Canberra to Port Moresby, and in April 1971 Charles Barnes announced that the Australian Government would "draw up a flexible program of movement towards internal

⁴*Ibid*, pp48-49

⁵*Ibid*, pg64

⁶*Ibid*

self-government.”⁷ In 1972, general elections were held which issued in a Papua New Guinean government. As Independence approached, many expatriates in Rabaul bid farewell to life in New Guinea and returned south. Some feared that Papua New Guineans would ‘turn on the Europeans and the Chinese’ and would ‘get nasty.’⁸ Others felt that Papua New Guinea would fall into anarchy; that its decolonisation would be as bloody as that of Africa in the 1960s. Tim continued working and living in Papua New Guinea, however, ‘never looking back.’

Chilla Bulbeck and Jan Roberts argue that in the decades leading up to Independence, Rabaul was socially and racially stratified and that even within the colonial community, there were hierarchies and exclusions. Missionaries were often ostracised, for example, by Government and plantation workers. Stephen Windsor Reed maintained that

there is a strong prejudice among the general European population against missionary work itself. Working intimately with natives, missionaries cannot and do not observe all the strict canons of white prestige, the code of caste.⁹

Quoting Kenneth Ballhatchet, Bulbeck argued that ‘membership of the white race but proximity to the dominated race produced “an ambiguous position on the margins of social distance”’ for those who lived in the bush away from the austere rules governing life in the towns.¹⁰ Within the non-missionary community, relations between plantation workers and government workers were also defined hierarchically. Expatriates were allocated a *caste* according to their relationship to Government House (‘G.H.’) on Namanula Hill. Norma Roberts notes that ‘you were either Government House or you weren’t. There was the Administrator at

⁷*Ibid*, pp210-211

⁸*Ibid*, pg214

⁹See Chilla Bulbeck, *Australian Women in Papua New Guinea*, op cit, pg128

Government House. You were either in or out.¹¹ Social 'demarcation was imposed down from the top down, from Government House on Namanula Hill.'¹² In a savage account of the social habits of the colonists, Margaret Matches noted that

in Rabaul, a cannibal island, a 'clark's' [sic] wife is not invited to tea with an executive's wife, who is herself but a nodding acquaintance with 'the administration' crowd, and the Governor's wife, high on Namanula Hill, speaks only to God.¹³

However, Anne McCosker argues that colonial relationships were always more fluid in Rabaul than Bulbeck claims, particularly relationships between Papua New Guineans and expatriates.¹⁴ She argues that in New Guinea

there was a great variety of relationships between the races and even within these individual relationships, as in any relationship, there was continual movement. A black servant might become a white man's mate, a woman kanaka the beloved nanny of a white child. In the bush, the white man would acknowledge the superior bushcraft of his black companion and the black man accept the white man's less fearful approach to the unseen forces...

The New Guinea population was made up of individuals. One race made laws according to its own kind, which could lead to injustice for those of other races but, on a one-to-one individual basis, the roles of the various races depended on the character of each individual.

The question of individuality was also the most important factor in deciding the role of the expatriate women — and black women — in New Guinea.¹⁵

Anne McCosker's observations are based on personal experience — emphasising the local and personal over the general and abstract: individual responses to Empire rather than the structure of Empire itself. She maintains that it is 'the post-colonialists who have constructed an unreal world, the rigid lines from which no one — man or woman, black or white — gets out of place.'¹⁶

It is beyond the scope of this present study to assess which of these writers is most

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ As quoted by Jan Roberts, *Voices from a Lost World*, op cit, pg175

¹² *Ibid*, pg 175

¹³ *Ibid*, pg 169

¹⁴ See Anne McCosker, *New Guinea Waits*, op cit, pp9-12

¹⁵ *Ibid*, pg 9

accurate in describing race and expatriate relations in colonial Rabaul; the issue of accuracy is paradigmatic and depends to some extent upon whether the historian emphasises the structure of Empire over the individual within the structure, or vice versa. What can be concluded from these different interpretations of colonial life in Rabaul, however, is that the expatriates dominated town life, were a central and motivating feature within it. This chapter begins to explore in more detail the expatriates' shift from this position of dominance to one of marginality in 1995. I begin by providing a framework in which to understand social relations at this time.

Alison Gough is an expatriate who returned to Rabaul following the 1995 eruption to 'help, as a nursing sister, wherever she could.' She wrote an account of her visit in the form of a letter published in *Una Voce News Letter*, the newsletter of the Retired Officers' Association of Papua New Guinea.¹⁷ She learned from Laureen Gray, a former mission nurse seconded to Rabaul for three months, that 'the atmosphere and notion of the people' has moved through various stages during the crisis:

At first there was trauma, dismay at the rapidity of the eruption with minimal warning; getting settled into strange surroundings with minimal facilities, accepting and giving help with urgency; a weariness; a feeling of "holiday"; adventure; an anxiety re their situation; an assumption that all will be well and they will return. Then a slow dawning that many of them will in fact not be able to return to their own land; and now a cramped style of living with poor sanitary conditions is leading to domestic unrest with some. There is restlessness as the Governments try to calculate whether it is feasible to try and rebuild Rabaul, or whether to set up a new capital (or four satellite cities in an entirely different area.)¹⁸

Alison Gough was interested in how the eruption had affected the community

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pg 12

¹⁷ See Alison Gough, 'Rabaul after the Eruption (2)', *Una Voce News Letter*, No. 1, 1995, March, pp14-15

¹⁸ *Ibid*

spirit and identity of the Papua New Guinean population. Klaus Neumann is also interested in this aspect of the disaster: he maintains that the eruption's impact on community life has been far more prolonged than expected. During the first few days of the eruption, food and tonnes of firewood were distributed to the hundreds of refugees who had evacuated to Kokopo.¹⁹ The Australian Government sent Hercules cargo planes which ferried food and tarpaulins to the area. From the second week, the PNG Defence Force soldiers assisted the Provincial Disaster Centre (PDC) set up at the Ralum Club in Kokopo to supply food to the refugees.²⁰ During the first few weeks, care centres sprang up around public buildings, schools, churches and government offices.²¹ A major care centre was established at the Vunapope Mission; Sister Shirley and others supplied food to the refugees. Operation Unity, as the disaster response was known, officially ended on 10 April 1995. However, many refugees had not been settled by that time.

By mid-1995, community structures and village life had still not been normalised and were, in some cases, still in disarray.²² Alternative settlements had been established by the authorities: some were at considerable distance from original villages and homes and proved an unpopular alternative to the re-establishment of Rabaul. Although comparatively well off following the eruption — they all had homes, most had cars — the expatriates were nonetheless affected by this social disarray. It had an inevitable impact on their feelings of well-being and personal and community security.

¹⁹Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg93

²⁰*Ibid*, pg94

²¹*Ibid*, pg101

²²See *Ibid*, pp112-121

This chapter focuses on the following themes: firstly, on the expatriate community's growing fears of a real or imaginary Papua New Guinean menace/peril in town; and secondly, on its uneasy and ambivalent relationship with the remaining Chinese business people in town. The concluding section reconsiders the expatriate community through the perspective of one expatriate who returned to Rabaul in 1995 after an absence of twenty years.

SQUATTERS' TOWN

Pauline Tong arrived in Rabaul from Sydney in 1976 after having spent a holiday traversing the Highlands with a girlfriend. In those days, Rabaul was *absolutely exquisite* although there 'were a lot of expatriates leaving and a lot of businesses were closing down.' 'There was a little bit of uneasiness about law and order, but not the pressures everybody has now.'

I met Pauline in Kavieng in early December 1995. She had lived in Nonga outside Rabaul until 1993; she and her Chinese Australian husband, Tim Tong, had had a 'wonderful life' on the beachfront. They moved to Kavieng after Tim inherited a takeaway and supermarket business.

Pauline had managed a hairdressing salon in Rabaul. She had led an 'easy type of life; a good life' in Rabaul. Her clientele in the salon were 'half and half:'

I was starting to get the National people interested in having their hair done. Would cut it, perm it, straighten it, colour it — they liked colour. They were the sophisticated women who liked having their hair done. I used to have a ball.

It [the shop] used to be where everybody dropped in to have cups of tea. We did a lot of shows — David Loh was my partner in shows we did... for charity — for the disabled and all that kind of thing.

Following Independence, Rabaul had begun to change:

When the Australian Government left, there wasn't the spraying for the mosquitoes, the health system dropped down. If you wanted to go to hospital, it was best to go to Vunapope [rather than Nonga Hospital] because all the nuns were still out there....

I felt as though everything was [becoming smaller].

Pauline also noticed other more disturbing changes:

Because there weren't so many expatriate people, I felt like we were very vulnerable. We had had some horrific experiences: my husband had saved a couple of expatriate's lives. A lot of awful experiences which I don't like talking about, really.

She felt *different* as an expatriate:

When I lived in Nonga, I felt I belonged more. We did business with the people — but there is always a barrier. Timmy [her husband] was always a bit wary of me being a white person going to the beach by myself; to do anything by myself.

I was only here two weeks and I had one guy with his arm around my neck. That makes me that little bit more aware. It takes a long time to get to know anybody — white, black, green or anything, or yellow [laughing].

In Kavieng, she still feels *different*. Shortly before we met, she had had one of those 'awful experiences' which are difficult to describe:

I've gotta go — there are not enough expatriates here and we're a target here. We are getting people from everywhere.

Two weeks ago, I had a dreadful experience. I got up at 3am in the morning to have a cigarette. Walked over here [demonstrating with her hands]. This grass was up. The security walked down and they came running out of the bushes and put a gun under him. Little did I know that people were in the shop already. So Tim came out, they shot at him a couple of times. It's time for me to go. Because we have a lot of money moving, and we're targets here....

Life isn't so easy because of the rascal element. That's changed us a lot; it's made me a little bitter and twisted. I've seen people die in front of me...

Pauline left Kavieng Christmas 1995, returning to Australia with her small son.

Her husband, who has Australian citizenship, planned to join her once he had sold the business.

Of all the expatriates I met in Rabaul, Bruce seemed to generate the greatest

notoriety. He arrived in Rabaul in 1990 to manage the Hamamas Hotel with Susan. In the early stages of the eruption, corrosive ash fell heavily on the Hotel's roof. Despite the fact people were forbidden entry into town during the eruption (a curfew was issued on 26 September), Gerry and Bruce returned to the Hamamas the second day to warn 'off looters' and to shovel ash off the roof. In an article that appeared in a magazine supplement to the Australian newspaper, *The Age* on 16 December 1995,²³ Gerry and Bruce were described as a 'gung-ho pair of expats.' Gerry told the journalist, Janet Hawley, that people had called them

"cowboys and idiots and said we'd die in the ash, but the more ash fell, the more we shovelled. We were filthy and exhausted for months, but while roofs around us collapsed, we saved three quarters of our hotel...

No sooner had we dug the hotel out and piled the ash in a great wall around it than the rains came, and flash floods filled the hotel up with mud, like a great well, The mud was worse than the ash. We got all the mud out, then we were flooded again."²⁴

The Hamamas remained vulnerable to flooding following heavy rains; Bruce adopted therefore a 'Rafferty's Rules' philosophy, 'bull-dozing semi-wrecked, empty neighbourhood properties (to the fury of their owners when they discovered it), carving drains and banks to try to control the floods and mudslides.'²⁵ He also became a vigilante: trying to disperse the squatters living in and around Rabaul because "'we can't let Rabaul degenerate into a squatter's town.'"²⁶

Bruce and Gerry wrote several controversial letters to the *Post Courier* in 1995. In one letter of 12 July, Bruce explained why he detested the return of the squatters to town.

This letter is in regard to the present policy of shipowners toward the transport of

²³See Janet Hawley, 'Under the Volcano', *Good Weekend: the Age Magazine*, pp32-47

²⁴See *Ibid.* pg42, 45

²⁵*Ibid.*, pg 45

²⁶*Ibid.*

itinerant settlers into East New Britain.

Before the volcanic eruptions last year, there were about 10,000 illegal squatters in and around Rabaul and Kokopo. These people were widely considered responsible for more than 90% of the violent crime in the Gazelle. Thus, through an act of God, one of the biggest problems in the Gazelle was brought under control. Thousands were given free passage out of the province....²⁷

Bruce argued that the shipping companies responsible for transporting the squatters out of Rabaul were now bringing them back. He maintained that

the Gazelle has just suffered a catastrophic blow to its economy and its ability to provide service. The roads are hopeless, the power is off half the time, there would have been better communications 50 years ago, and on top of this we now have to deal with an influx of people who have no respect or loyalty for this beautiful province...

If Port Moresby and Lae are examples of how to fill up a city with aggressive bands of youths who have no thought of building anything, just tearing it down, then we do not need it here. Rabaul had that problem before and everybody in the Gazelle must recognise the danger and work hard to keep it under control.

Every crime committed is directly linked to higher unemployment. Why would a businessman employ staff and invest in infrastructure when his business is going to be robbed and his wife raped?

There are certain constitutional laws regarding freedom of movement, but large numbers of people who have no hope of getting a job in a province with an unemployment rate already of 70% are coming in by ship. The ships are the key.

I believe the shipowners should show some responsibility and allow only those people with a letter of employment to gain passage to the Gazelle.

Be a Rabaul-friendly shipping line and do not fill our province up with squatters. East New Britain has had enough bad luck lately without stretching our meagre resources any further.²⁸

Many of the squatters despised by Bruce were from the Sepik region; they were not Tolai. Klaus Neumann notes that some had actually lived in Rabaul for over a decade and considered it their home. Large numbers had been repatriated to their home provinces following the eruption only to be ignored or forsaken by authorities. They returned to Rabaul out of loyalty and nostalgia; they were not always itinerants as Bruce maintained.

²⁷See Bruce Alexander, 'Stop shipping Settlers back to the Gazelle,' *Post Courier*, Wednesday 12 July 1995, pg 10

²⁸Ibid

Bruce respected the Tolais. Ironically, however, most looting of the town during the early stages of the eruption was carried out by Tolai villagers, not by squatters. Neumann notes that expatriates also looted. By implicating the squatters in all crime activity in the town, Bruce was simply recapitulating ongoing historical grievances that had become increasingly inaccurate. The Sepiks were an absolute Other within the expatriate imagination: an illegitimate presence within it.

P.R Sharp responded angrily to Bruce's letter in the *Post Courier* of 19 July. He stated that

despite the rather hysterical and in parts incomprehensible letter from Mr Alexander [Viewpoint, July 12], most of the shipping companies carrying passengers into Rabaul during the emergency did comply with regulations when there was a curb on carrying people into Rabaul....

Now there is no emergency legislation in force, yet here is an expatriate complaining about the constitution of a country in which he is a visitor and suggesting that for his own safety and comfort Papua New Guineans should not be allowed to move in their own country.

For someone newly arrived in PNG to suggest such a thing must surely be deranged. A charitable explanation could be the dust.

What Mr Alexander is really complaining about is an increase in crime, which happened to coincide with school holidays....

His attitude appears to be: "we (I) don't want you in Rabaul even though you are a Papua New Guinean and I am a foreigner. You are going to steal what I have and rape my wife. However, if you want to come to my hotel and spend your money on food and booze you will be accepted (even if you are a Papua New Guinean) because you will be giving me more of your money..."

Mr Alexander wants only those with a pass to be allowed into Rabaul. Shades of the old colonial system when no native was allowed out after sunset without a pass from the "Masta". What about a pass to say who is allowed to drink and who is not?²⁹

One day, Bruce showed me a book titled *Ditch Medicine*, which he claimed (with a smile) had been acquired from an extreme Right Wing organisation based in the U.S. It contained pictures of gangrene limbs and gun shots wounds — offering practical advice on how to deal with different injuries in a war-type situation. As

he showed me this book, Bruce maintained that Rabaul was *like a war zone* — a frontier. While this description is not accurate, it is interesting. Following the eruption, Bruce and other expatriates increasingly feared the loss of social boundaries and distance between one community and an[other] — over-emphasising the squatter threat as a way of articulating this fear. Personal fears were attached to historical fears. As Amirah Inglis has argued, sexual and social anxiety also permeated relations between Papua New Guineans and Australians during the colonial era. She argues that the introduction of the White Women's Protection Ordinance in the 1920s was the product of hurt male prestige, authority and racial pride. The Ordinance stated that any rape or attempted rape of a white woman or girl would be punishable by death through hanging — predicated on misguided ideas about the essential barbarism and sexual rapaciousness of Papua New Guinean men. Expatriates still alluded to this register in 1995. Unlike the Tolais, who had been civilised through missionary contact as early as the nineteenth-century, the Sepiks were regarded as a people without civilisation or home.

THE OTHER EXPATRIATES

Julian Murphy was born in Goroka in 1963. In 1972 he arrived in Rabaul with his parents and younger brothers. His father was the Headmaster of Boisen High School and also the national coach of the Papua New Guinea Rugby League team. The family left Papua New Guinea at independence. Julian returned to Rabaul in early 1995 with his wife, Sally, who had been recruited to teach at Kerevat High School.

²⁹See P.R. Sharp, 'The Freedom of Movement,' *Post Courier*, Wednesday July 19 1995, pg 10

Julian always *remembered Rabaul... It's one of the first memories of really knowing what's going on.* He returned there in 1995 out of nostalgia: he wanted to return to the place of his early childhood.

Growing up in Rabaul in the early 1970s,

there were just Australians everywhere. It was almost another part of Australia. The Tolais were around but Rabaul town was basically Australians....It was like a country town that was lifted into the tropics whereas now its fitting into the Tolai, the Rabaul way of things.

He never considered himself a foreigner in town because there was a belief within the European community that

this was ours because we ran the place. I suppose it's like how the French feel about places like Tahiti. Tahiti is ruled as if it were a prefecture of Paris. Same as some of the other French colonies. It's the same thing. It's *our* place and everything — the infrastructure — was put in by Australians. We had the Commonwealth Bank, the ANZ Bank, Telecom. You used Australian money so it was just an extension.

Julian played with European kids at school. When he went to the Palm Theatre to watch movies and stand and sing to the National Anthem, *God Save the Queen*, he always saw the same kids. 'The same bunch of kids having the same fights and throwing jaffas at one another.'

Other communities within the expatriate community had no place in his world; they were not consciously excluded; they were simply not invited in. Early on, he developed an awareness of his difference to the Chinese, for example, predicated

on an essential separateness rather than fear:

I remember my Dad going back to Australia and being asked whether there was much racism there. I can't remember the question exactly but someone asked him about the race difference and he said, "It's not something that's mean or hatred; it's just a knowledge of the fact that the Australians and the locals and the Chinese are all different and everybody recognises that there's a difference thing." The Chinese basically ran their shops — were very frugal. They didn't do much but run their shops — but everyone knew that that was a good thing because you could get what you wanted from those people.

David Loh maintained that the Australians and the Chinese community were still

'living in isolation' in pre-eruption Rabaul:

There was very little interaction between the Australian community or the Filipino community or the Chinese community. They kept to themselves basically and people on the fringe overlapped. There were probably half a dozen Australians who were friendly with the Chinese and would go to their place for dinner and mix with them. And vice versa. But the bulk of the Chinese and the bulk of the Australians stayed there and there.

Those who moved between the different communities did not look

upon the Chinese *as* Chinese, I suppose, and basically it was the Chinese who acted and spoke more or less like Australians, who'd probably been to school in Australia ...who were acceptable... [who could] speak good English. The Chinese who spoke Chinese tend to keep to themselves. I mean, they look on the Caucasians as ugly, ignorant people anyway. And we look upon them as primitive Hong Kongs. And yet in each society, they've got a lot of things. The Chinese are incredible people when you look at them as a race. But that's not [considered] acceptable.

Pauline Tong was one such person who did not regard the Chinese *as* Chinese, as other; although she did maintain that as a group they tended to stick together, entertaining mostly at home. The fact that she was married to a Chinese man (whom she had met upon arriving in Rabaul) meant that

we had a lot of Australian and Chinese friends, mixed race friends. But we entertained at home...Other women married to Chinese men formed a little group in themselves. The husbands had businesses — they were long term Chinese of this place. They put quite a bit back into the place.'

The Chinese were originally brought to New Guinea as indentured labour by the Germans; they worked on plantations in much the same way as they did in other

parts of the Pacific such as Samoa. In 1920, there were approximately 1400 Chinese, 100 Japanese and a few Malays in New Guinea.³⁰ Race was an important form of identification in the colony. In the 1921 Census, for example, citizens had to state whether they were of 'European race' or some other race. Amirah Inglis maintains that during the early colonial period the Chinese were defined in terms of what they were not. Examples were given of 'a person other than European race, ie. Aboriginal, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu etc.'

These persons [other than European] had to state the names of their races in full. In the case of people of mixed race the letters H.C. — for half caste — were to be added, for example, H.C. Aboriginal, H.C. Chinese, etc. Those classified as half caste had 'European blood to the extent of one half.' No offspring of a mixed European and non-European union might call himself H.C. European. Whereas the off-spring of a Chinese-Papuan union or a Polynesian-Chinese union might choose which 'half' to belong to, the offspring of a European-Chinese union or a European-Papuan union might not. White was made non-white by the mixture; black was not made non-black.³¹

During the 1920s, the largest number of non-Europeans in Rabaul were the Chinese. 86% of non-European males in Rabaul were Chinese and 73% of non-European women. They mostly came from the south-east provinces around Canton. Many of those who stayed on in New Guinea following the end of indenture worked as artisans and merchants.³² China towns grew in all centres of New Guinea. Joe Taylor, who was interviewed as part of Hank Nelson and Tim Bowden's *Taim bilong Masta* series, maintained that

we didn't have very much to do with them [the Chinese]. They didn't mix into the white society at all. They had their own little set-up amongst themselves. They were about the middle standard; you could put it that way. But we used to patronise their stores and they were always very pleasant and realised we were superior beings. At least, they let us know that. What they thought amongst themselves is another matter.³³

³⁰For a discussion on divisions of race in Rabaul, see Amirah Inglis, *Not a White Woman Safe*, op cit.

³¹*Ibid*, pg27

³²See Hank Nelson, *Taim bilong Masta*, op cit, pg 29

³³*Ibid*, pp 29-30

Susan and Bruce Alexander spoke with me on several occasions. They lived in a small flat within the grounds of the Hamamas Hotel. Following a family dispute with Gerry in 1996, they moved to Madang where they currently manage the Madang Resort Hotel.

Susan spoke of her childhood in Rabaul with fondness and deep affection. Rabaul had always been 'aesthetically beautiful — a *wonderful* childhood — something out of a story book.' It was

safe, friendly, clean, very clean, wonderful family life, beaches on the weekend. Clubs, big clubs. It's not like these days where everybody gets drunk. We didn't do that back then. People played golf and they played tennis and squash and they had parties and that sort of thing. It wasn't a sit around after work; it was a real family atmosphere. Everybody brought children. If you had a party, all the children were invited and you all played and the house staff played together. It wasn't like we had servants or anything. They were part of the family. They were staff.'

You knew everybody. You'd go down the street and they'd say, "Morning, Missus" to my mother. "Look at Susan: she's getting fat!" Or, "Isn't she getting so tall!"...We used to have fun hopping in the PMVs and never once did we think sexual assault or rape or robbery. There was nothing like that. We used to have a group — a healthy mixture of girls and boys — and I suppose there was the odd naughty thing going on. We all went to parties and they were conservative parties. And we thought they were wonderful. There were no drugs; they were all good families 'cos they were all in the same boat ... [working] in the managerial sector....

Looking back at those memories, she still considered herself to be of 'the colonial [mind set.]' She tried

not to be. I'm still in the old league... Like Bruce, he goes around and tickles all the staff. I'm not brought up like that. I was brought up [with] the staff being staff and we were friendly with them. Bruce tickles Nessie [who nannies their daughter, Rosie] and I can't even imagine my father or my friends' sons *touching*. So that's really funny to me. Things like sitting around and drinking with Nationals — that's really uncomfortable to me. I really like the Nationals — I think half of them are more decent than our side — but I just can't get used to that. And I can't get used to growing up ... There are certain things I am not used to....

However, despite her anxiety about mixed marriages ('life is so difficult as it is, let alone having to have this....'), she had always enjoyed the cosmopolitanism of pre-eruption Rabaul. The town was like a *melting pot*. The mixture of things,

people and tastes has been the greatest *influence* on her life:

being brought up not with baked chicken but with soy sauce and [the kind of] Kentucky fried chicken they [the Chinese] make, salty plums. Food is a big influence. Going into Chinese friends' houses and meeting their grandparents who were brought here by the Japanese.

Bruce continued: 'We had a tennis match one night. There were sixteen people and I counted nine non-National members: Chinese, Malay.'

However, both Susan and Bruce felt that following the eruption, a greater divide — a social distance — had developed between the Europeans and the Chinese community.

Susan: *'There was a huge Australian Chinese community here before the eruption. (They became Australian after independence.) And they would have a big slice of the action of businesses but during and after the eruption, they've had little impact. It's been the Australians who have made the big [noise.]...The Chinese used to be very strong. I don't know where they lost it...'*

Bruce: *'There's probably a lot more money in the Chinese community than in the Australian expat community.'*

Susan: *'Most of them have stayed thirty, forty, fifty years, sometimes second generation.'*

Bruce: *'We can't understand their attitude. It's in your own best interests to try to improve you community because if you've got a good community, it's easier for your business to improve. They seemed to just want to live in dingy old sheds and sit behind their counters and rake the money in...'*

Susan: *'A lot of the Chinese here have just thrown the towel in and left. So most of the Chinese are now in Kokopo and they don't really care if Rabaul lives or dies because they're actually flourishing. Which is fine.'*

Bruce: *'But they are still not trying to make Kokopo a better place.'*

Susan: *'They just don't seem to get involved. The Chinese used to be a very strong and vocal community but now it seems...'*

Bruce: *'They all own houses in Australia so I think they're saying, "Let's just make our money and when we decide to pull the pin we will pull the pin."'*

The Chinese and Australians were essentially different:

Susan: *'the Chinese will always be traders and very good traders. They bring in things that we'd never bring in so there's always going to be food around. But in terms of leadership, in terms of planning, future planning...*

Bruce: *.. trying to do something constructive for the community... See, the Chinese and all the others — the Malaysians — which is the new breed of expatriate coming in — they're only in, out, overnight merchants. They won't build any decent architecture, they're quite happy for it to be a shanty town as long as they make their money. That's the attitude we want to change and maybe we're being foolish even trying to change it. Hell of a job because the New Guineans don't mind it being a shanty town either. It seems that the Australians are the only ones who want to build decent buildings and there are only a few of those Australians who want to do that too.'*

Susan: *'We just naturally go to town planning; we get architects to make it look pretty good. It's just in us to do that whereas the Chinese tend to build the same face walls.'*

Bruce: *'Standard shed that they put their goods in. Maybe that's good business too because there's no doubt that the country isn't stable...'*

Susan: *'So maybe they're doing the right thing. Maybe it is a good idea not to put money into structures and things...'*

Bruce and Susan claimed that Australians remained in Rabaul because they respected ideas of permanence and belonging — investment in buildings and infrastructure was an investment in the idea of permanence. The Chinese were, on the other hand, mere transients and opportunists: they had no sense of belonging, no sense of the meaning of permanence and place.

Julian, Bruce and Susan's reflections reveal contradictions in the idea of community and memory in Rabaul. Boundaries between communities shifted — ideas of assimilation, accommodation and separateness were maintained at the same time. It appears that Bruce and Susan wanted Chinese support in the re-establishment of the town for economic and emotional reasons. The union of the Chinese and Australian communities would create a barrier of protection against

the squatters and other undesirables in the province.

NOTHINGNESS

Julian spoke with simplicity and poetry about his feelings of disillusionment upon returning to Rabaul after 20 years absence. His wife, Sally, had applied for the teaching job in Papua New Guinea in early 1994. Ironically, she received notification of the success of her application the morning the volcano erupted.

Wandering the deserted grey streets of Rabaul in 1995, Julian was confronted with a painful sorrow:

I suppose when I first went there, there was no recognition of the place. Even though you could see the signs and see the bits of buildings that you recognised, there was no recognition of this being the same place as the old Rabaul. It's been a transformation. Any emotions you had towards the old Rabaul have gone. The new Rabaul has destroyed all of them. And what I was really looking forward to when I first came — this was prior to the eruption — was the fact that I would be able to go back and through these places of my childhood — I had all these memories of enjoyment. And when I got here they were all gone. All lost. So I could never really recover those.

So my memories of them are still childhood ones. I look at the old Rabaul Primary School and sort of see the old tree and roughly see what the old buildings looked like. But it's just so *desolate*. And I couldn't stay in any of their hotels. The Kaivuna and the Hamamas. The fact that you get out there and there's just dust — the horrible film of whatever it puts on you. It sort of smothers you. I don't like it any more.

This disillusionment extended to the expatriate community as well. It was now (contrary to claims made by Susan and Bruce) very transient, plagued by its own sense of impermanence:

I think that even people who have been here thirty years feel that they're in a temporary state. They are here for a temporary purpose. They are here to do something for however many years — they will always go back. A few haven't — a few have taken out citizenship — but the majority feel that this is a temporary state. Even if the majority of their life has been spent here. They always know that they're going back.

John Beagley also felt that an impermanence permeated the community in Rabaul.

He maintained that *real expatriates* were people who regarded Papua New Guinea as an 'end — not a means to an end.' Increasingly, Rabaul had been filled with contract workers who *endured* Papua New Guinea for the sake of money — who were not the real thing. Neither Julian, Bruce, Susan nor John identified with this transient population.

John and Julian both referred to Australia as a lifeline or umbilical cord on which they would tug in an emergency. Julian and Sally in fact returned to Australia in December of 1995; while John Beagley moved back to Rabaul the following year. John hoped that he would not have to tug on that life line. The term *south* [Australia] meant 'a safety valve. Papua New Guinea is not the place I knew as a boy. I think of Australia as a place where if everything went totally wrong, you could go.'

Many of the expatriates experienced the strange paradox of living at a distance to Australia through the expanse of time rather than space. Confronted with the fragmentedness of their present situation, they felt uneasy, however, in returning to a place which they now considered fast paced and brutal. They stood out as personalities and identities in Papua New Guinea; in returning to Australia, they would become anonymous again. As I explore in the following chapter, Australia was a great expanse of people and space in which they felt they had no place.

This chapter has considered the idea and experience of community in Rabaul. It has argued that the expatriates lived in a state of social anxiety in the town in 1995. Social boundaries between communities were being both maintained and blurred at the same time. The expatriate community can be defined as a *border*

community: living on the social boundaries of the town, memory and history. As James Clifford has argued, diasporas (like the Rabaul expatriates) 'usually pre-suppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future.'³⁴

³⁴James Clifford, 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9(3), 1994, pg304

Chapter Four

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world — and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.

— Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*.¹

Julian Murphy arrived in Rabaul as a nine year old and left at the age of twelve, on the threshold of adolescence. In the spaces between these different moments of childhood, he developed identities, awareness and concepts of the world which have endured into adulthood. During his adolescence in the town of Bunbury in Western Australia, he remained nostalgic for Rabaul. It was as though Rabaul was not only the home of his childhood, but also of himself.

Julian's early memories of Rabaul in the 1970s were tinged with awe and wonder. He remembered being over-whelmed by its magic and beauty – by the sheer scale and dimension of things. The mountains dominated the harbour; sometimes, big British and Australian war ships arrived in town, anchoring 'right up close.' He liked going down to the harbour to inspect the ships. They appeared 'bigger to me as a kid.' He also loved the famous Rabaul market located on the corner of Malaguna Street and Casuarina Avenue. He used to go there on Saturdays with his brothers. His Dad would give them twenty cents each. For that twenty cents 'you could buy two mangoes, a heap of peanuts. Everything was roughly ten cents – because it was still in Australian currency.'

¹Quoted from Drusilla Modjeska (ed.), *Inner Cities: Australian Women's Memory of Place*, Ringwood: Penguin Books in association with the Literature Board of the Australia Council, 1989, pg4

The market (*bung*) loomed large in his memory:

Just great big long lines and the concrete and the tin shelters. I just remember big long lines and not much difference to Kokopo market but it was bigger and more organised....I don't remember the market being any more than masses of bananas and yams and *kaukau* and that local produce.

Sometimes Mum would accompany them to the market, buying local craft and art work. Julian was sad the market had been destroyed during the eruption. Kokopo market had taken its place, but on a far smaller scale. Crafts, *bilums* (string bags) and jewellery could not be purchased at Kokopo in 1995.

During those three years in Rabaul, Julian's senses awakened and he acquired skills in English and the Pidgin (*Tok Pisin*) spoken by the 'mixed race kids who came to our school.' Early on, his Dad bought a Type 3 Volkswagen with a 751 Porsche engine unavailable back in Australia. It cost them \$3,000. They used to travel at fast speed along the North Coast Road into Rabaul; chugging down Namanula Hill. Learning new languages and seeing new places around the Gazelle were part of the process of growing up and of beginning to get a feel for 'what's going on.' It was a singular, natural and nuanced process:

As I got older, I became more competent in speaking to people. And it was funny because as I learned more pidgin, I [came] to learn more about the place. I always remember as a kid how I used to not know the difference between taro and another plant. And I remember that as I got older I used to be able to spot a taro in the bush and dig it up and take it home. And husking coconuts. When I was younger I could never do it; it was much too difficult. But as I got older – say a year before we left – I could husk a coconut and I could pick out different plants. I could tell the difference between sugar cane and just grass. For a kid there's not a hell of a difference. The awareness of the place around me and also the awareness of pidgin sort of grew together with my age. We spoke to some of the local villagers and they thought we were very interesting. And they'd come and speak to us. So as I expanded from the North Coast – we'd go from the school through the villages and we'd go down to the beach. As that world expanded so did my knowledge of pidgin. It grew together. It wasn't a result of one or the other; as I got more aware of where I [was], I also learned more about the people and pidgin.

These experiences lodged in his memory. When he returned to Papua New Guinea

in early 1995, detailed memories of sounds and smells re-awakened:

The smell of mustard – the pepper stick they dip in the lime when they chew *buai*. It's funny that you say smells because when I came back I smelt these things I thought, "Oh, that's a pepper stick. Someone's chewing *buai* around here." Even though I hadn't smelt that smell for twenty years. It was an instant recognition of what it was. And the *pourri pourri* leaves they use for their dances and stuff. A lot of the villagers have it growing nearby and you smell it on the wind. So the smell of *pourri pourri*, and the pepper stick and *buai*... the frangipani as well on the wind. The whole musty atmosphere of pungent frangipani, *buai* and the *pourri pourri* – all that kind of thing sticks in your mind. And it was twenty years since I first smelt them. But they were instantly recognisable.

Pidgin phrases also returned to him:

It's funny but I didn't really learn much pidgin [as a child]. By the time we left here, I was just picking it up. But I didn't think I knew much pidgin until I came back here and then suddenly I realised that I could understand all this stuff they were talking about. And so picking up pidgin now was quite a quick process. I'm not very good but I can understand it and know what people are talking about and be able to communicate. Pidgin was a kind of second thing; you just got into the habit of using pidgin phrases. You would speak English. But I remember we used to play soccer and some of the local guys used to have the ball in the middle and smash their feet against it, both kick as hard as they could at the same time. Two opposing forces. Someone's leg had to give way. We used to call it *blukbunya*. You'd run up and kick it and "Ah, *blukbunya*!" Broken bone.

You didn't realise you used [pidgin phrases] until perhaps you returned to Australia. When you said that things were buggered, people would look at you funny and think you were being a rather rude little boy!

In the midst of this process of self exploration and development, Australia seemed a distant place, far removed from the immediate pleasures of the moment:

For us kids who had lived our lives totally in Papua New Guinea, Australia was this kind of magical place with big shops – you could get everything you wanted. That's the difference I found now. There are not that many Australian kids here anyway. They tend to be a bit older; the people tend to be a bit older....The community was much larger then; now it's much smaller.

In 1995, Julian no longer considered Australia a magical place: it was after all the country in which he had spent most of his life. Rabaul town had also lost its magic. He left in December 1995 — disappointed that the Rabaul of the present could not be reconciled with the Rabaul of the past. Rabaul had become a

‘landscape of shattered dreams.’²

This chapter focuses on expatriate feelings of alienation towards the Australian homeland in 1995. Attachments to origins were in the process of being severed by time; some expatriates felt forsaken by their homeland, having moved to Papua New Guinea following a decline in job opportunities in Australia. In my previous chapter, I argued that expatriates like Julian Murphy and John Beagley regarded Australia as an umbilical cord on which to tug only in an emergency. I elaborate on this theme in the second part of the chapter — exploring the idea of *(dis)identification*.³ In the first section of this chapter, however, I provide a framework in which to understand these processes of detachment — examining Australia’s disinterest in its former colony in 1995.⁴

DIVIDED TIME

Rabaul once held a special place in the memories and affections of Australians living back home. Australians fought both world wars in the islands and mainland of Papua New Guinea.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies ‘suggested to the Australian government that if it felt willing and able to seize German wireless stations in New Guinea, Yap, and Nauru, it would be performing a great and urgent imperial service.’⁵ The Australian government agreed to the request: on 11 September 1914 Australian soldiers landed at Kokopo

²Craig Skehan, ‘Apocalypse Now: Rabaul’s Year in Ashes,’ op cit

³See James Clifford, ‘Diasporas,’ op cit, pg304

⁴Since 1995, Australian interest in Papua New Guinea has increased again. The Australian Government aid agency, AusAID, was, for example, very involved in the recent drought relief operations throughout Papua New Guinea.

without resistance and raised the Australian flag. A party of naval reservists then proceeded to Bitapaka to take the wireless station but encountered German resistance. Fighting ensued — although the Australians eventually succeeded in capturing the station. As Hank Nelson notes, these soldiers were the first Australians to ‘fight and die in the Great War.’⁶

The next day the Australians captured Rabaul:

In a square bordered by casuarina trees and white bungalows, Colonel Holmes formally raised the Australian flag in Rabaul. The naval band played, the troops sang the national anthem and gave three cheers for George the Fifth, and the fleet in Simpson Harbour fired a twenty-one gun salute. In bad Pidgin English, the assembled New Guineans were told that they now had a “new feller master” and he would “look out good you feller.” The great imperial change from German to British rule was expressed in the slogan “No more ‘Um Kaiser. God save ‘Um King.”⁷

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the colonies formerly administered by the Germans became the Australian Mandated Territory in 1921 and a Trust Territory in 1945. What had been British New Guinea in 1884 – the south-east – became the Territory of Papua in 1906. From 1945 the combined Territories were officially Papua-New Guinea, then Papua and New Guinea. At Independence these territories were brought together under the single moniker *Papua New Guinea*.⁸

The Australian experience in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War was far more devastating and had a greater impact on Australians back home: ‘The place names – Kokoda, Coral See, Milne Bay, Wewak, Lae – became familiar to Australians; they attached history and legend to them.’⁹ Following the bombing of Pearl Harbour in 1941, the Japanese flew reconnaissance planes over

⁵ See Hank Nelson, *Taim Bilong Masta*, op cit, pg25

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*, pg26

⁸ *Ibid*, pg 9

⁹ *Ibid*, pg193

Rabaul and Kavieng. In response, the Australian authorities began evacuating the 1800 white women and children in the islands, disregarding, however, the plight of women and children in the Chinese community.

The Japanese made their first raid on Rabaul on 4 January 1942. 1400 Australian men, mainly from the 2/22nd Battalion were stationed in preparation for an attack. In the fighting that ensued, the Australians were defeated. Nearly all those who surrendered were killed via execution or on Japanese boats sunk by the allies.¹⁰

'The Japanese continued moving south into the Solomon Islands and on to the north coast of New Guinea. In mid-1942 the Allies held the Japanese in battles on the Coral Sea, on the Kokoda Trail, at Milne Bay and at Guadalcanal. About half of Papua New Guinea was under Japanese control.'¹¹ Nurses and missionary sisters had been exempt from the compulsory evacuation of white women — most chose to remain at their posts.¹² Some were trapped by the battles; over 200 foreign missionaries were dead by the end of the war. Some old government and planter expatriates were also killed.

As the tide of war began to turn against the Japanese, Rabaul was heavily bombed by the Allies. By the time the war ended in August 1945,

virtually all that had been Rabaul was in ruins. The skeleton outlines of streets and foundations remained, but the months of bombing had been so intense that hardly a wall was left standing. Destruction of the town by Man had far exceeded the minimal damage inflicted by the 1937-43 volcanic eruptions.¹³

In 1995, many Australians living in Rabaul remained interested in the battles fought in Papua New Guinea during the Second World War. David Loh and Sister

¹⁰ Ibid, pg196

¹¹ Ibid, pg 197

¹² Ibid, pg195

Shirley were particularly interested in Rabaul's war history: David had heard stories about Papua New Guinean involvement in the War from his Tolai friends; Sister Shirley was interested in the plight of the Sacred Heart Sisters and Fathers killed by the Japanese. The war had had a tremendous impact on the culture of the expatriate community, destroying the 'old New Guinea.' Hank Nelson maintains that by

1945 all of the north coast and the island settlements were a litter of bomb craters, splintered buildings and the wreckage of army camps. The war divided time for Territorians. The *taim bipo* (the time before) became those increasingly hazy days before the war. A "before" (sometimes "B4") was a white person who had been in either Territory before 1942.¹⁴

As the years have worn on, however, Australians back home have lost interest in the battles over New Guinea. Nelson argues that

Australians at home have rarely been excited by the achievements and failures of their fellow countrymen in Papua New Guinea although those actions may be the most significant that Australians have undertaken beyond their own shores. Only the dramatic details of a missionary eaten, a fabulous gold strike, a lost valley, a man bites crocodile and war have attracted the attention of the Australian public.¹⁵

The 1994 eruption brought Papua New Guinea to the attention of the Australian public again. As I noted in my Introduction, the media focused on looting and the plight of Australians caught up in the evacuation. David Hueston has maintained that the volcanic eruptions reinforced Australian perceptions of Papua New Guinea's social volatility. Australia expects lawlessness from Papua New Guineans; it paints them as 'essentially volatile, spirited, sometimes dark and

¹³ See R. W Johnson and N. A. Threlfall, *Volcano Town*, op cit, pg147

¹⁴ Hank Nelson, *Taim bilong Masta*, op cit, pg 193

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pg 7

unknown, prone to sporadic episodes of disobedience.’

Stretching out a benevolent hand to peoples bereft of our rational economising culture justifies Australia’s continuing commercial presence in Papua New Guinea — and cautiousness defines the style of our presence. Papuans are seen as “other worldly people, accustomed to a static way of life, shy of change.”¹⁶

While Australia is now the ‘adopted daughter of Asia...Papua New Guinea, as always, is our disobedient child.’¹⁷

As the months wore on, however, Australian interest in Papua New Guinea declined. In 1995, the expatriates expressed disenchantment with Australia’s lack of interest in their welfare. Interviewed for an article in an Australian newspaper, Bev Martin, who manages the Kaivuna Resort Hotel with her husband, Brian, maintained that ‘the outside world has largely forgotten Rabaul. “There is life coming back into the town but everybody thinks it’s dead.”’¹⁸ An awareness of their plight — and of Papua New Guinea in general — is now limited to institutions such as the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University, or to friendship associations such as the Retired Officers’ Association of Papua New Guinea. Forsaken by their countrymen and women, many Rabaul expatriates felt compelled to abandon Australia.

THE FOREST FROM THE TREES

Sister Theodore lived in retirement at the Vunapope Mission in 1995. She first arrived in Eastern Papua in 1949. She stayed there five years, returned to Australia for extended sick leave and then returned to Manus in 1959 where she remained for twenty years. Originally born in England, she came to Rabaul in 1980 and has

¹⁶See David Hueston, ‘Images of Chaos’, *Arena Magazine*, Feb-Mar 1995, pg 6

¹⁷Ibid

been there ever since.

Sister Theodore has rarely travelled into Rabaul itself; her life has revolved around the activities of the Mission. She has always thought of Vunapope as a 'mini city.' She trained to work as a teacher and nurse and came to Vunapope as a tutor in the School of Nursing. After four years tutoring, she joined the Family Life Movement:

I had a little office down there at the front of the maternity. I'd go down there about half past nine in the morning and come back at midday. Go back at about 2pm and work until four or five, depending upon what was happening. Actually very few clients came in, but they did come. Mostly the ones who came were married and their story was mostly: "Married 6 years, 2 years, 10 years; and *no pikininnis!*" That was almost always their story. I was very adept at trying to teach them what might be wrong, how they might be able to go about it. Unfortunately, of all of them, only two ever came back to report whether they succeeded or not. The two that did were quite rewarding.

On certain days, I would give talks in the maternity wards. And of course during that time we had the AIDS epidemic so I used to, with consultation from the high schools, give Grade Ten two talks each. That took up quite a bit of time – they had 4 Grade Tens in Rabaul, 2 in Boisen and other places...

Clients still occasionally visited Sister Theodore in 1995. She felt that missionaries still had a role in dispensing knowledge to young Papua New Guineans. They need to

know all this talk about feminism, what happened at Beijing, the horrors of artificial contraception and all this business. We want the leaders at least to be properly educated so that they can carry on. We don't want them to remain bush kanaks forever.

In the midst of the day to day activities of missionary life, Sister Theodore maintained little interest in life on the Australian homeland, even though the majority of the sisters at the Mission were Australian. She felt uncomfortable with

¹⁸ See Craig Skehan, 'Apocalypse Now: Rabaul's Year in Ashes, op cit

the changes that were taking place there:

Our Australian people are going a very different way to us. A very different way to us. And no, I'm afraid we don't fit in when we go down...Anybody who goes back is retired and they have a life of their own.

In Papua New Guinea, she had never tried to live the *Papua New Guinean way*.

Nonetheless, her life was different to the lives of the sisters who had remained in Australia:

You get used to a completely different life. One thing you don't have is the opportunity to spend money and live high like the way they do down there. Unfortunately over the last few years we have drawn much further apart than we were before because going back between the wars, you were giving in a very primitive fashion – really close to the people – so when you went back to Australia it was a new world altogether. It's not the same now. It's quite a different culture....[it's a] completely different world to the one we left 20, 30 years ago.

Sister Theodore did not consider Australia home. 'Unfortunately Britain's in the same spot now, so I haven't any home.' Australians were proceeding into the future 'without thinking.'

Steve Day had similar feelings of contempt for Australia. He arrived in Rabaul in 1979 after having led an itinerant life as a construction worker in Australia. He was from Gladstone in Queensland and came to Rabaul to help his brother build an abattoir.

Steve had always enjoyed working and living in country towns in Australia; Rabaul appealed to him in the 1970s because it was similar to those towns in which he had worked:

In those days, it was still common if a white woman walked down the street for the Elders to stop and turn 90° and let them walk by. Those little things which were the remnants of the colonial period were still here.

In those days, law and order was not a problem in any way. A very picturesque town ... always kept in good order.

Despite the introduction of policies of localisation at Independence, the expatriate community remained united by 'common interests.' This commonality has diminished as the years have progressed.

Steve bought a share in New Britain Quarries in 1980, a company that constructs roads, bridges, wharves: 'Big Steve' – as he was affectionately known by Sister Shirley – helped evacuate Rabaul during the eruption and has been responsible for reconstructing many of its roads. As I mentioned in my Introduction, he was reclaimed by the Australian media during the eruption — a long lost son doing his former country proud. Big, bearded, and acutely perceptive, he was amused by this interest in his activities. He maintained that he had changed as a result of his experiences in Papua New Guinea:

When people came here, they came outside of the influences that had changed Australia. What are the influences of Australia? TV, a Prime Minister [Paul Keating], who wears Italian suits, French-made shoes. That influences Australians in Australia. When they come out of it, they revert back. Australians who live here — like me — are sort of in metamorphosis. We're not changing our habits, evolving at the rate that Australians are. After you have lived out of Australia for 20 years, it's different.... The place is stuffed.

He was no longer a proud son of Australia. Australia had become a foreign country: it had changed too rapidly since the 1950s. In the 1970s Papua New Guinea was 'a lot more like the Australia' he was 'born and bred in to;' it was for this reason that he had stayed. During the 1950s, there had been a 'huge amount of opportunity for people who would work and none for those who wouldn't.'

Australia has changed its attitudes. I probably know more about Australia being an Australian who lives outside the country than any Australian who lives *in* Australia. You see it from a different perspective: it's a bit like the forest and the trees...

He didn't like the attitudes of 1990s Australia, and had no expectations of returning.

Prior to the eruption, Tim Wilson's Rabaul Coffee Shop had been a profitable business employing 11 young girls. It was most famous for its Bachelors' Table which attracted a special brand of expatriate:

The reason the Bachelors' Table was formed was because there was a growing number of people who were coming into Rabaul for business and they'd stay over a night or a couple of nights, but they wouldn't necessarily come with their wives. And there were others who were married and whose wives had returned to Australia or New Zealand.

They had no domestic facilities back wherever they were living: a bed and a shower and a change of clothes and that was that. But they'd go out to eat. We got our share at the Coffee Shop. It was air-conditioned, a real living going atmosphere. It was birds of the feather. On that table, we were *all* Europeans. There were doctors from Nonga Hospital, businessmen from around town. They don't want to go out and sit at a table all alone. You kept informed; you knew what was going on all the time. It kept me on the ball: there was nothing that went on in town that I didn't know about. We were birds of a feather.

The Bachelor's Table was a place for sharing memories and experiences:

We talk the same language. I can refer to something in Queen Street in Brisbane and everybody else on the table knows what I'm talking about. And that was the way it was. They [Papua New Guineans] no doubt talk about something – the bush – which we have no knowledge of. And we're holding them back. When work's over and you are going out at night for a bit of fun, I think you automatically go to your own kind.

Because the social life in Rabaul was varied – 'You could get in the car and say to your wife: Will it be one of ten different venues?' – Tim rarely felt nostalgic for life in Australia. However, as the expatriates dispersed following the eruption, he had begun to feel lonely — missing regular contact with his own kind. In 1995, he had begun establishing a business at Submarine Base on the north coast. He wanted to stay on in Rabaul, although he maintained that Papua New Guinea is not generous towards its old. (Health services are limited for example). What he missed most was not Australia but the awareness and culture of Australianness permeating pre-eruption Rabaul. He missed sharing memories with people from a similar background and culture.

Eva Hoffman maintains that

loss is a magical preservative. Time stops at the point of severance, and no subsequent impressions muddy the picture you have in mind. The house, the garden, the country you have lost remain forever as you remember them. Nostalgia — that most lyrical of feelings crystallises around these images like amber. Arrested within it, the house, the past, is clear, vivid, made beautiful by the medium in which it is held and by its stillness.

Nostalgia is a source of poetry, and a form of fidelity. It is also a species of melancholia, which used to be thought of as an illness.¹⁹

Hoffman is describing the immigrant experience in its most *pure* and poetic form: as an experience of separateness from the adopted country; as an ongoing separateness and sadness for the loss of the old country. Immigration is often characterised by a fidelity to the past. In this sense, it is the heaviest of burdens. Migrants who assimilate into the adopted country with ease — who feel little or no regret in leaving the old — are promiscuous — suffering an *unbearable lightness of being*.²⁰

Many expatriates interviewed in 1995 were *promiscuous* migrants, travellers, tourists: Don Juans of experience²¹ — leaving Australia in search of work in Papua New Guinea. However, they did not necessarily embrace the new country. Sister Theodore remarked that she no longer had a home. Julian Murphy left a year after arriving, even though his wife Sally had originally been contracted for two years. Returning home was a necessary journey for the Murphys: a way of getting away from unhappy surroundings.

David Loh and Susan and Bruce Alexander felt alienated towards Australia for a different reason: they felt restricted by its laws and work ethos.

¹⁹See Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, op cit, pg115

²⁰*Ibid*, pg116

David Loh took out Papua New Guinean citizenship during the Australian Labor Party's years in power. He was born in Victoria and last returned to Australia in 1991. He owns property on the Gold Coast in Queensland. He has a sister in Australia but maintains only scant contact with her: when we spoke in 1995, he had only talked to her once on the telephone since the eruption. He had no immediate desire to return to Australia on a permanent basis, although he felt it his birthright to make that return if Papua New Guinea plummeted into anarchy.

David led an idyllic life in Rabaul immediately before the eruption. Typically, he used to wake up when he wanted, 'wandering around in a *laplap* all day long. And in the evening, sipping gin and tonics in a hammock in my beautiful garden.'

No day was ever the same:

You make plans – all these plans ahead of what you're going to programme yourself to do. You wake up in the morning and everything goes wrong....So you re-write you plans and start again. So every day's a new day. You cannot possibly get bored. Every single thing goes wrong. And you just re-do your whole day....It's a challenge to your mind...and everything else. You can either go one way and get completely frustrated and hate the place because nothing ever goes right but who wants a 9 to 5 job anyway? Boredom, Boredom, Boredom: the same thing every bloody day. You come in and you sharpen your pencil; you sit at your desk and you do the same thing every day like an automatum....[Up here] you play it by ear. And you get the job done in the long run. You just take devious routes and get everything that has to be done.

Back in Australia, there were just

high rise buildings, noise, cars, rat race, go, go, go, go; no chance to relax. Something's happening all the time. Noise.

Bruce and Susan Alexander maintained some contact with Australia: they relied on Australian rather than New Zealand or Asian hotel suppliers.

²¹Ibid

Bruce liked Papua New Guinea because he could break its rules. Susan maintained that

coming from the country where you faced drought and have to budget and you're cash poor a lot of the time – facing wild animals – that gives you a good back up for things like volcanic eruptions...It came naturally to him to fight, to take over when the chips were down. He just sort of took over. I mean, my father usually led the way, but Bruce just got in there because he's always been a vigilante, he's always broken the rules. So when they [the authorities] told him that you can't enter the town, Bruce would be nice and say "Yes". And get into the town. Never was he going to accept a "No."

Bruce disliked Australia because its rules could not be as easily broken. He hated traffic lights and police:

You can't get away with anything! [Laughing in mirth.] All these other things. And up here you're relatively big fish in a small pond. And that's enjoyable. So it's much better, it's *much* better living up here.

However, in the post-eruption period, it was more difficult to take over (as Bruce was inclined to do) or to enjoy the benefits of retirement (as David had done). What had been enjoyable had now become a burden. As President of the Chamber of Commerce, David spent long hours writing letters to members of the GRA and Government, in the hope of persuading them to restore Rabaul. Bruce was publicly condemned by many for his actions in town — including one attempt to chase squatters from a settlement in Rabaul. The costs of life in Papua New Guinea were beginning to outweigh the benefits.

During the early colonial period, Australians travelled to Papua New Guinea via ship. As the Second World War approached, a regular flight was established between Sydney and Rabaul. After the War, most Australians travelled to New Guinea by plane. Despite the fact that travel to and from Rabaul was convenient (although expensive) in 1995, many expatriates remained at a great distance to Australia. They were now separated by the expanse of time rather than space. This

distance appears insurmountable: the experience of time is an experience of perception and memory — and the gaps within these are not easily traversed.

In detaching themselves from their origins, many Australians found themselves in an ambiguous position. In 1995, they remained Australian in culture but not in origin: they *dis-identified* with their homeland, a paradoxical process predicated on the loss rather than the acquisition of positive, vibrant identities. Australia had become an absolute Other against which they were unable to assert alternative cultural lives and formations. As a result, some led lives of ‘disarticulation rather than rearticulation’:— their fragility poignant and over-whelming.²²

²²For a discussion on the gender implications of exile, see James Clifford, ‘Diasporas,’ op cit, pg 313

Chapter Five

Memories allow us to gather roses in the winter

— Nigel Dolley's memorial panel, *The Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt*

Make a happy memory today for tomorrow because yesterday is too late

— Glen Lawrence's memorial panel, *The Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt*

Anna Phillips begins her personal memoir, *As the Catalina Flies*, by recounting a persistent dream in which she is trying to return to the spaces of her childhood.¹ Between 1950 and 1955, Anna's father was posted as a medical officer to Buin on the southern coast of Bougainville; she and her mother accompanied him — staying five colourful and formative years. In her dreamlife, she yearns for the Buin of her memory:

The boat is packed ready and I'm certain that this time I'll make it. It doesn't matter that I have grey hair instead of plaits or that my glasses keep sliding down my nose. I have aged physically, but I feel young and optimistic and that's what counts. I know Buin waits for me unchanged. Soon I will be home. I push the boat into the waves. But the journey is an interminable series of waves and I seem to be making little progress. I long for land clouds on the horizon to announce the first smudge of my coastline. Though I force the boat on and will the clouds to form, the seas go on and on. Reluctantly comes the realisation that I've failed again.

Every now and then I defy the failure and persist with the dream. The seas gradually give way to the beloved hills, dark against the sky, and the steep beach encircled by coconut trees. Plodding through the sand, I look for houses, canoes, people I once knew. The saksak canoe house is gone and in its place stand dilapidated fibro sheds. Instead of the bois I expect to see, there are Europeans carrying cameras and binoculars.

I wonder where they've come from and notice for the first time the towering sides of a cruise ship which reduces the beach and even the hills to insignificance. The people are disgruntled. They had been promised tropical splendours and plenty of local colour. But there is nothing here, even the beach is black. I become aware of this too. The Buin I've longed for is nothing but a sordid Europeanised hamlet in the middle of nowhere. Panic sets in. What am I doing here if there is nothing else? I must discover the Buin I knew, and fast, before the dream ends. I race for the road that seems to lead towards home even though the jungle has gone. I'm prepared to accept such changes provided I can locate some fragments of the past. I come to the final bend in the road where the steps should begin the climb to my house. They are not there. It simply can't be done. I can't return, not even in my dreams.²

¹See Anna Phillips, *As the Catalina flies: an Hungarian Girl growing up in Bougainville*, Springwood, NSW: Butterfly Books, 1993, ix

²*Ibid.*, vii-viii

Phillips was born in Wolfratshausen, Germany, in 1945. She states in her *Introduction* that

[t]hough we didn't realise it at the time, my mother, father and I were busily manufacturing our memories. Because I was five years old when I arrived and ten when I left, my memories tend to be sepia-toned and sometimes blurred around the edges. Not everything I write is absolutely true, for this [her memoir] is not a strictly factual account of the times, but an attempt to recreate the way Buin and later, Sohano, looked and felt to me. Some things are probably incorrect because my memory is hazy or because I didn't grasp certain facts at the time. I could have researched the subject more thoroughly to be more precise, but then it would not have portrayed how I felt my world to be. A child's view is constituted not of facts but good and bad feelings, smells, colours and textures. What facts existed in my life tended to float about in a disembodied way and carried less weight than the intangible.³

Anna's longings for Buin are remarkably similar to those of Julian Murphy for Rabaul. Both remember the sounds, textures and colours of their childhoods with extraordinary clarity and sensuousness, revealing important details about the nature of childhood remembrance, and the relationships persisting between adult and childhood selves. Both have been haunted by the past and have felt compelled to relive it — often disillusioned and saddened in the process.

Now in Australia, Anna has always felt a sense of intimacy and separateness from her past:

I have come to realise that Buin belongs to a different time and place, yet it is also an integral part of me. For better or worse, it has set me apart from those who have not had a similar experience.⁴

She thought of herself as an *oddity* until she listened to Tim Bowden and Hank Nelsons' *Taim bilong Masta* series, which features interviews with ex- Papua New Guinean residents:

It was a relief hearing others admit they too felt out of place and different when they came 'down south.' I particularly identified with one person when he said he had

³*Ibid.*, ix

⁴*Ibid.*, viii

difficulties relating to ordinary Australians and that he was most at ease talking to other Territorians or expatriates from former British colonies....

We are a strange band who are not only cut off by distance and time, but also history. We are throwbacks to an earlier era. When Independence arrived in 1975 the places we had learned to love returned to the people of Papua New Guinea. The intimacy was broken and Territorians were no longer needed or wanted. Memories are all we have left.⁵

Jack McCarthy also spent a period of time in Papua New Guinea and was similarly affected by the experience. He worked as a patrol officer (*kiap*) for the Australian Administration in the 1930s, working around the Gulf of Papua. He wrote a memoir following a trip to Kikori in the Delta Division in the late 1960s, thirty years after first contact with the area.⁶ His memoir is divided into eight sections referred to as *Journeys*. He begins with a *Journey into Decay*, before proceeding into Journeys of Hope, Genesis, Fear and Depression, ending his memoir with Journeys into Fantasy, Contradiction and Future. Unlike Phillips, he fulfils the ambition of returning to Papua New Guinea in *real* (as opposed to *dream*) time; but is also disenchanted with the changes to the environment and people.

Phillips noticed the deforestation of the Buin jungle in her dream; McCarthy's first journey into Decay centred on the disorder and chaos wrought on the landscape of Kikori by licentious Nature. Travelling up the Kikori delta, he noticed how the mudflats had begun encroaching on the waters of the gulf in a

continuous timeless battle between the powers of earth and the forces of water with a third contender, the primitive vegetable kingdom, seizing every possible square inch of thick, clay mud to implant its seeds and multiply.⁷

⁵*Ibid*, viii

⁶See Jack McCarthy, *New Guinea Journeys*, London: Robert Hale and Company, 1970

⁷*Ibid*, pg2

Here was a 'section of the world fighting for survival.'⁸ Decay extended to the handiwork of the human inhabitants of the area as well:

Sometimes one can glimpse the decayed remains of beams and posts laying at crazy angles in the rubble of a vanished population. Mostly there is nothing but the coconut palms to mark the spot and a thick carpet of secondary growth hiding its relics.⁹

McCarthy's memoir is largely about loss — but a loss that can only be understood through the frameworks of memory and the ambiguities and assumptions of colonialism. Feelings of loss are often responses to the passage of time: a way of bringing the past and present into a meaningful relationship. As McCarthy travelled through the delta landscape, following 'old-time tracks and waterways [he] had journeyed on before,'¹⁰ his reaction was to say, 'I remember.'¹¹ 'The shadows of the past were emphasised by the desolation of the present and they carried a host of regrets.'¹²

The expatriates in Rabaul in 1995 often felt nostalgia for life before the eruption: their nostalgia sprang from personal and social anxieties in the present. As Klaus Neumann has remarked, *nostalgia* has Greek roots. In Classical Greece, *nostos* means to return home; and *algos* means pain.¹³ Within the expatriate imagination, nostalgia was an ache in the present brought about by the loss of the past. As David Lowenthal has remarked, the past is a *foreign country* not bound by the laws of the present.¹⁴

⁸Ibid., pg 3

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Ibid., pg 4

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid

¹³See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg163

¹⁴See David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985

This chapter considers the memories of four expatriates who have returned to Australia from Rabaul: Dennis Nicholls, who currently resides in Canberra; Mike and Jean Bourke also of Canberra, as well as Sister Marie-Jean, a Catholic Sister who lived and worked at Vunapope, but who now lives in retirement at the Sacred Heart Convent in Bentleigh, Victoria. I focus on the memories of these expatriates as a way of reconsidering issues of personal memory while also providing an alternative perspective on the experience of expatriatism in Rabaul. There are important differences in the ways in which these expatriates remembered the past: the most obvious difference is that they are not bound by the laws of an unhappy present: they have not lived through a volcanic eruption. However, their memories are similar to those of the expatriates in Rabaul in so far as they are constituted through displacements in time and space. Like Anna Phillips and Jack McCarthy, these expatriates are simultaneously intimate and separate from their memories.

I begin this chapter with Jean and end by reflecting further on the memories of the expatriates living in Rabaul in 1995.

THE RINGING OF THE BELOS

Drawing on memories as well as the imaginative conventions of short fictional prose, Jean Bourke wrote a story about cultural shame entitled 'Trent Nathan and the Tractor Driver'. It appeared in a collection she co-edited with three other women entitled *Our Time but Not our Place: Voices of Expatriate Women in Papua New Guinea*.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Myra Jean Bourke et al, (eds.) *Our Time but Not Our Place: Voices of Expatriate Women in Papua New Guinea*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993

'Trent Nathan and the Tractor Driver' is set in the Highlands — in a fictitious place called Akuna — and depicts the impact of a brazen and adventurous woman, Jenny, on the expatriate narrator and her Papua New Guinean house staff. Jenny arrives in the Highlands from Sydney adorned with high heels and make-up, expensive clothes and gossip, ready to experience *buai*, and other exoticisms of Papua New Guinean culture. She is accompanied by her young baby. She has also brought an expensive Trent Nathan t-shirt with her, which is mistakenly thrown out with the baby's nappies. At the story's end, Jenny has returned to Australia and the narrator has retrieved the shirt from Wali, who drives a tractor and is married to her *haus meri*, Ori. In so doing, she has humiliated Wali and Ori. She is left staring at the night, acutely aware of the differing values and attitudes of the two cultures.

The title of the collection *Our Time but Not Our Place* as well as the Foreword that serves as its frame foreground the ambiguous nature of memory. The Foreword is brief and schematic, emphasising the diversity of responses to life and cultural contact in Papua New Guinea. The title is evocative; distinguishing time from space, suggesting that the possession of a moment in history does not always presuppose the possession of the space in which that moment is experienced.¹⁶ Beyond brief autobiographical notes on the contributors — entitled 'Pen Portraits of Contributors' — the collection is not organised around a significant editorial voice: Jean and her co-editors deliberately chose this format so that the stories and memories would stand on their own.

Jean has written other stories, one of which has been published in *Blast*, an alternative Canberra journal; she is presently working on a collection of life histories of women who have migrated to Australia from the Asia-Pacific region. Her partner, Mike Bourke, is an agricultural scientist based in the Human Geography Department at the Australian National University, working as a consultant for AusAid and the Papua New Guinean Government. In 1995, he was involved in a project mapping land and the use of farming systems in contemporary Papua New Guinea.

Jean and Mike met in Rabaul in 1970, and stayed until 1977. During his time in East New Britain, Mike was working at LAES at Kerevat, doing surveys of agricultural production on the Gazelle Peninsula, as well as agronomic research on subsistence food crops. For recreation, he frequently went on caving expeditions. Jean initially worked as a secretary for Coconut Products Limited (CPL) on the outskirts of Rabaul town, before teaching Papua New Guinean women typing and secretarial duties at Tavui Secretarial College and then in Rabaul town.

I interviewed Mike and Jean on four separate occasions. Both of them spoke about Papua New Guinea from a position combining distance, intimacy and enduring commitment and affection; the country remains a presence in their lives, particularly for Mike who has made a career out of his experiences there. After leaving Rabaul in 1977, they returned to Toowoomba in Queensland, and in 1978, made their way back to the Highlands, where Mike worked at the Highlands

¹⁶ Jean confirmed that this title was in part a reaction to the title of Hank Nelson's series, *Taim bilong Masta*. The editors wanted to stress the point that while expatriate women have spent time in Papua New Guinea, they never laid claims to 'owning' or truly belonging to the place.

Agricultural Experimental Station. They returned to Australia in 1983. Mike has been back to Papua New Guinea many times since then; Jean has not.

During my second formal conversation with Jean, she made a number of references to Jan Roberts' book, *Voices from a Lost World: Australian Women and Children in Papua New Guinea before the Japanese Invasion*. She had only just acquired a copy of this study, which, as mentioned previously, draws extensively on the testimonies of women. At one point, she commented on the fact that the book had brought back so many memories of her own life in Papua New Guinea, memories that had been forgotten, or been lost within and through the flux of time. The book seemed to open up new windows of memory, or, to use another metaphor, to highlight what had been cast in shadows. One thing that intrigued her about the book were the pictures of the elegant old residences established by the German planters during the early part of the century, but which were then expropriated by the Australians following the First World War. She had rarely seen these residences during her own time in Rabaul; in fact, there was much about the physical environment which she could no longer remember, which resides as a curious absence within her. The fact that there were absences in her memory was particularly evident when I asked her to re imagine herself walking down Mango Avenue, encouraging her to see and smell the memories of this road. This question was intended to make her a central presence within her memories, to re-centre her within the experience of memory itself. However, she admitted that, at least in terms of the architecture of the buildings along this

precinct, her vision was unclear:

I can't remember a lot of them. Certainly places like the Trinity Press were unpretentious, in effect shed-looking buildings. I suppose that most of the windows were louvres. We used to go to the cinema. In my mind, it's not all perfectly clear where the cinema was in relation to this and that. I can remember the cinema we went to was not the *boi piksas*. That was a bit further down. Can you imagine [that]: *boi piksas*? [She is referring to the colonialism inherent in this] I forget the name of the cinema we went to, but further down the road was another crappy-looking shed and that was the *boi piksas* where Papua New Guineans went. It was mainly men who went to those movies too. There might have been a couple of expatriates making a point. Watching some crappy old Western. Dreadful! [hooting with laughter].

The detail of Jean's memories fluctuated during our conversation. Sometimes her presence in her own memories was partial and incomplete — when for example, she went on to discuss the Chinese community living in Rabaul and was uncertain as to whether it ever celebrated New Year with flaming dragons and firecrackers as the Chinese communities do in Australia. Other times, however, her memories were clearer, and details came back, such as those relating to visits made to plantation houses outside of town:

Oh, some of them were fabulous! There was a year when I was teaching at Tavui before I was going out with Mike...[That] year, three or four of us were hanging out with BP plantation managers and one of the big things was to go for weekend house parties. Wander[ing] around in an alcoholic haze for the whole weekend — people drinking themselves silly. [You] might have 20 or 30 people at a plantation party, as long as it was within driving distance. And a lot of those plantation houses were like some of the pictures you see in the book [by Jan Roberts] which show houses slightly raised up on stilts — not as high as a Queensland house — but certainly high enough so that air could circulate underneath. Some of them had big open verandahs but you walked straight into a lot of them. But the houses only had half walls. There wasn't any glass; there'd be a huge overhang of the roof; what in effect was the top half of the walls were actually push out shutters which were permanently opened out. There'd be great long poles holding out these windows — the wooden shutters — and some of them had fly-wire — mosquito screening put in the top half. Huge, huge old rooms with half walls. Often they were set in gardens... of frangipanis... [there] were big spreads of [lawn] around the houses. And you would always have the smell of copra because you had the copra factories on the plantations.'

What also intrigued Jean about the plantations were the sounds and images of the *belos* (bells):

I saw an expression in that Jan Roberts book; a lot of things are coming back to me. It's unreal that I could forget the significance of the *belo* — meaning, when the bell

rang it was lunchtime, or the little bell — *liklik belo*, meaning morning tea time. What was often struck as a bell at the places where Mike lived — the Ag station at Kerevat — was some old remnant from the war time. It might have been a lump of metal off an old blown-down aeroplane — someone would bang away on this thing and that was the *belo*. You finished lunch or morning tea and it was *belo bek*. Back to work. You would often see this big iron thing hanging around the plantations and a lot of the places where labourers worked. A big bell that was struck when the bosses 'made line'. That was always a feature.

It's unreal that I could forget the significance of the belo, Jean remarked, yet in this and subsequent passages, she presented deeply evocative images of life in Rabaul; as if they were not removed in time and place after all. She found images — signposted her memories — in the midst of uncertainty, of *unrealness*, after all.

Mike's and Sister Marie-Jean's memories of Rabaul also revealed complex relationships with the past. Mike returned to Papua New Guinea several times in 1996; Sister Marie-Jean left in 1992 and will never make the return. When Sister Marie-Jean spoke about life in Rabaul, it was as if she were bringing together an array of disparate elements into a single tapestry. Like many expatriates in Rabaul in 1995, she maintained that it had been beautiful in pre-eruption days:

To me it was very beautiful because it was all laid out...and they had a frangipani street. It was all lined with frangipani and just now they had the frangipani festival — just before the volcano...It was just a small town but ...I don't know...it was lovely....

Sister Marie-Jean worked as a nurse at Vunapope. Following Independence, her role in Papua New Guinea changed

because the people had a feeling of self-importance, you know, and they wanted to do things themselves. I suppose it changed my role...with the nurses in the hospital. They felt they could do things. Because I was used to doing everything and just ordering them to do things. The people who were educated — their attitudes changed. That's to say, "We are just as good as you are."

Mike's memories also brought seemingly disparate elements together. Reflecting on life in Rabaul in the 1970s, he was struck by how such a large proportion of the

expatriate population was unaware of events leading up to the declaration of self-government in 1973, and later, Independence:

The islands were a totally different mentality. It was a plantation mentality in those days — totally different to the Highlands and Moresby. When I had been in Kerevat a few weeks, I went to Kavieng and rolled up at this party. And the debate going on at that party was whether Papua New Guinea would ever be independent. 'Ever' meaning the end of the century. The consensus view was: 'Not for another two hundred years.' This was June 1970, even when the Australian administration under the then Liberal government had put a whole string of programs into place. The *kiaps* were just about to lose their role; 1970 on the islands people were debating whether it would ever happen. No one even considered that you'd have self-government in three years...

When I read the patrol reports now — years later — it's apparent that all sorts of things were taking place: the patrol officers were being told to prepare people for self-government. Change their role and become advisers. At the time, [many of] the expatriates [were unaware of the political situation.] The senior people apparently didn't know about it.

Hank Nelson points out in *Taim bilong Masta* that even as late as 1963, ten years before Papua New Guinea achieved self-government from Australia, there were

few preparations for the speed of change. No Papua New Guineans occupied senior positions in the public service. No Papua New Guinean had graduated from University, and only twenty-five were at the top of secondary school....There was yet to be a general election in which all Papua New Guineans would vote, and two thirds of the people did not even have a local council in which they might practise the rituals of electing representatives.¹⁷

In an article appearing in the *Australian* newspaper on 7 August 1995, Peter Ryan maintained that independence was 'imposed against the will of the PNG people;' that Whitlam, 'with deep unwisdom, forced a sham and premature independence on our former colony.'¹⁸ He argued that since 1975, Australia has been propping up the economy of its former colony with untied Budget aid, and later aid targeted at specific projects — creating a 'frightening foreign policy problem...swelling up like a boil, just across the Torres Strait.' Ryan's view is not unique and was sometimes shared by expatriates living in Rabaul in 1995 as well. However, Mike

¹⁷ See Hank Nelson, *Taim bilong Masta*, op cit, pg 209

¹⁸ See Peter Ryan, 'Evans must lance PNG Boil,' *The Australian*, 7 Aug 1995, pg11

and Jean did not share it: their feelings for Rabaul (and Papua New Guinea as a whole) were far more generous and subtle — their memories belied ongoing respect and commitment towards many political and social changes taking place in the country. Both reinterpreted their memories of Rabaul in the 1970s through frameworks of change and dispersion. Mike's memories focusing on the pre-independence period are framed through hindsight; by knowledge acquired after experience has come and gone. As a result, there are certain disjunctures in the continuity of his memory: revisions, new appraisals, and understandings.

Dennis Nicholls worked for the Department of Territories in the Gulf province from February 1966. He was born in Wales in 1935. He left Papua New Guinea in 1974, returning to England to do a course in agricultural and community development. In early 1977, he returned to Papua New Guinea, working as a Senior Information Officer in Port Moresby. He left in 1979, and then returned to Rabaul between 1988 and 1989 to work for the Cocoa Board, trying to determine the level of cocoa production in villages on the Gazelle. What struck Nicholls when he returned to Papua New Guinea after Independence was the change in the general atmosphere of the place. "It was like coming to a foreign country," he said; formerly *expatriate* suburbs had now been reclaimed by Nationals. He felt that there had been a general deterioration in services; post-Independent Papua New Guinea was in a state of decline. He felt disenchantment with his visit.

The memories of Mike, Jean, Sister Marie-Jean and Dennis revealed the complex ways in which the past is renegotiated through the prisms and desires of the present. Their memories were intimately entwined yet separate from the past. As

Collingwood concluded, 'the past simply as past is wholly unknowable; it is the past as residually preserved in the present that is alone knowable.'¹⁹

THINKING THE OTHER

During the course of her reminiscences, Jean remembered two important events held in Rabaul during the 1970s: a ball in the New Guinea Club; and the visit of the Queen. She attended the New Guinea Club ball along with other expatriates adorned in their best gowns and bow ties. What amazed Jean at the time was the curiosity of the Papua New Guineans towards the expatriates' Otherness. Later, Jean told me that the ball

was just one vivid example of a common phenomenon: the social caperings of expats being unselfconsciously ogled by Papua New Guineans...This desire on the part of Papua New Guineans to see expats acting out special rituals was, in my mind, the cultural inverse of us expats driving into the Bainings so we could sit and stare at the spectacle of Bainings men *bilas*'ed and acting out their special ceremonies.

She was fully aware at the time that the colonial gaze was being inverted — that the colonial Self was now the object of Spectacle — strange and out of place. As an expatriate, Jean was a witness to her own spectacle, her own sense of not belonging, split between her own vision and that of the Papua New Guineans.

Jean felt disappointment over the Queen's visit to Rabaul. The Queen arrived dressed only in a short-sleeved dress — looking like any 'White Missus.' Jean identified with the disappointment of many Papua New Guineans who had expected the Queen to at least be wearing her crown. The Papua New Guineans

¹⁹Quoted From David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, op cit, pg187

had

expected the *nambawan meri* of us whiteskins to wear special *bilas*, to look like the *Missus Kwin*, as they called her. If she was so important, why didn't she dress accordingly?

In describing both these events, Jean fused her own perspective with the imaginary perspective of Papua New Guineans, fracturing her visions, imagining the place of the Other.

In a general discussion about race relations in pre-Independence Rabaul, Mike recounted the story of a caving expedition in which he had participated while working on the Gazelle. The expedition extended over some days; he and other expatriate participants slept and ate in one tent; while the Papua New Guinean contingent slept and ate in another. Recently, Mike encountered one of the Papua New Guinean men involved in the expedition and was ashamed when the image of segregation was brought up. He saw himself from the perspective of the Papua New Guineans — able to imagine how this segregation must have appeared from the Other side.

Jean and Mike's memories of the ball, the Queen's visit and the caving expedition revealed something about the nature of identification with a colonial past. Their memories revealed a sympathy and capacity to identify with Papua New Guineans and to think in terms of the Papua New Guinea Other. Hindsight and distance from the object of their memories meant they engaged with the past in a thoughtful and self-reflexive way.

I was often puzzled by an absence of self-reflection on the part of expatriates living in Rabaul in 1995. To some extent this absence reflects on me: I was an

outsider to the community; I may not have always asked the most appropriate or relevant questions. However, I often felt that the expatriates actually resisted probing too deeply into themselves: it was as if they feared encountering a heart of darkness within themselves, the dark nightmare of Freud's unconscious. Many expatriates — for example — Sister Shirley and Sister Theodore — were sympathetic towards the plight of Papua New Guineans during and following the eruption. But most, with the exception of those who had married into Papua New Guinean culture, were not always able to identify with that plight. Identifications across community boundaries were generally absent; the Other remained distant and abstract. This is not to suggest that the expatriates were *selfish*; rather, they were simply caught up in the absolute loneliness and singularity of their suffering.

Chapter Six

Sweetness of home
Green harbour of Rabaul
Ripe with fruit of Eden in hibiscus of black hair.

Volcano in the mountains,
Bougainvillea on fire
Old Mother bursts hot lava about her sons....

— Excerpt from *Rabaul* by Anne McCosker¹

In 1995, Klara Cheasley and her husband, Ray, lived on Page Street in a house barricaded from the outside by guard dogs and a high fence and gate. Ray worked as the Manager of Rabaul Metal Industries (RMI), a subsidiary of the Australian steel company, BHP. They first arrived in Papua New Guinea in August 1992 after Ray had successfully applied for a job in Port Moresby with New Guinea Steel. They arrived in Rabaul on 11 September 1994, just eight days before the eruption.

The Cheasley home was located towards the beginning of Page Street, just below Graeme and Dawn Little's beautiful home. Some of the houses along the street remained abandoned or were in the process of being restored. Part of Sector One, it had received some ash fallout during the eruption. By 1995, however, natural processes of regeneration had made it green again: trees and shrubs grew on the sides of the bitumen road; the odd frangipani and bougainvillea flower provided some contrast against the green vegetation.

Klara wrote a personal account of her experience of the eruption for me in late 1995; she maintained a diary during and after the eruption and has provided me with copies of entries for the first few days of the disaster. It is clear from these

¹ Anne McCosker, 'Rabaul' in *Potter's Clay*, London: Matala Publishing Company, 1973, pg 16

different written accounts that the eruption has had an unexpected and prolonged impact on her life. She had only just begun to settle into the lifestyle of Rabaul when the volcano erupted; she knew little of what Rabaul was like before the disaster.

Feelings of fear and helplessness were clearly expressed in her diary entries for 18 and 19 September 1994. At 2.00am on Monday, she and a friend, Lyn Gerber, evacuated in a convoy of about eight cars to Kerevat Club. As they travelled to the Club, they encountered

miles and miles of cars on the road heading out of Rabaul, people everywhere on the roadside walking, carrying their belongings and rolled up mattresses with them, ...utes... crammed full of people... either broken down or run out of petrol but being pushed. I am not sure how I feel, apprehensive, anxious, worried, not quite sure of what's happening yet still thinking that we should come back home tomorrow and everything would be alright.²

At 3.15am, the convoy arrived at the Club, but Ray and Lyn's husband, John, did not meet it. As the night progressed and the women slept in their car, they began to realise that things were not going to be 'alright' after all. As morning approached, Tavurvur erupted followed shortly afterwards by Vulcan. Klara was able to see the cloud rising from Vulcan from the Club:

It looked just like an Atom bomb explosion. It is the most amazing thing I have seen ever. It was just like a giant mushroom growing into the sky and within about 1/2 hour there was a trail of dark cloud heading straight in our direction. Within an hour of the eruption, the trail of cloud was right above us and starting to rain dust like black hail and the smell of dust and sulphur was quite over-powering, we had to breathe through a hanky to tissue or whatever was available.

²Klara Cheasley, 'Excerpts from Diary', my personal collection

As the hours passed, Klara became more fearful:

There are people coming in all the time [to the Club] with different stories, none of them really good, we kept asking everyone that drove in if they had seen John & Ray but no one had — I am starting to get very worried about their whereabouts and if they managed to get out of town safe or not.

Ray and John arrived at the Club about 4.30pm, 'so worn out and just about dead on their feet. Ray was quite emotional and just as happy to see me as I was to see him.'

The next day, Klara, Ray, John and Lyn and a friend, Jim Royle, decided to make the most of their time at the Club, finding a unique way to entertain themselves:

Lyn & Jim decided that we should play a game of golf to fill in time, so we did — we all borrowed a club from Lyn as she had her golf clubs in the boot of her car. The golf course was covered in volcano dust but we had a few hits anyway...

There was little food and water at the Club. At the height of the evacuation, hundreds of people headed towards Kerevat and settled at the Club. Many headed further out towards the Baining Mountains, staying in the grounds of Vudal Agricultural College where they were provided with fresh food and beef from a freshly slaughtered cow. Despite the fact that Kerevat was at considerable distance from Rabaul, it suffered from ash fallout because of the direction of the wind and the heavy rains. Klara, her husband and her friends survived on tinned fish, baked beans, tinned braised steak and onion, tinned spaghetti, 2 Minute Noodles and beef crackers salvaged from a trade store outside Kerevat. On the second day of the eruption, they drove to Tokua plantation outside Kokopo, staying there two days. Life at the plantation was a complete contrast to the dust

and dirt of the Club:

What a magnificent change from Kerevat. The grounds were massive and beautiful, kept with a swimming pool, the house was enormous. Ray made us braised steak and onions with 2 Minute Noodles for dinner which went down really well after the last few days of beef crackers. Went for a drive to the beach after dinner to check the volcanic activity. Lava was flowing from both.

Reflecting on those experiences a year on, Klara still remembered how fearful she had been that first day:

Did we really come all the way to Rabaul for Ray to die buried under the volcanic ash and for me to go home on my own with his body?" This was just one of my most frightening thoughts as I sat surrounded by hundreds of strangers on that fateful Monday morning of September 19, 1994.

The eruption was 'an experience that I'm glad I've been through but hope like hell everyday that I don't have to go through again.' Rabaul was like a place 'starting off' again. The people who had remained in the town still faced the enormous challenge of 'getting a town going again. Go[ing] into a wilderness and start[ing] off a community again.'

She and Ray moved back to Rabaul in early 1995. Klara used this opportunity to help establish a craft morning for the remaining expatriate women in Rabaul; this became a regular social occasion for the exchange of gossip and for the establishment of friendships. However, as 1995 progressed, Klara spent less time at these gatherings and instead began to spend most of her time at home, gardening on the weekends and doing housework. In the evenings, she and Ray watched television, occasionally going out for a meal at the Kaivuna or the Hamamas. The major highlight in the couples' social calendar in the last fourteen months had been the Big Bang Ball:

Great... it was a wonderful night. Just to have something that social like a dance. Because Ray and I love dancing and for the first time in 12 months we got dressed

up to the eyeballs and got out and had a dance and a great time ... yeah, it was a great night.

The Big Bang Ball had broken the routine of their daily lives. Klara felt isolated in town because like many other individuals and businesses, she did not have access to a telephone. Originally from Canberra, Klara's four adult children were in Australia and she missed weekly contact with them.

In late 1995, the Cheasley house was filled with bounty collected during a lifetime spent in Australia: personal belongings and a miscellany of collectibles and furniture shipped from Australia. It had a feeling of permanence about it. Ray was in his early 50s and he and Klara were intending to stay in Rabaul for a further five or six years; they would then *go finish*, retiring to Queensland. Klara described her house as *home*. 'It's a haven. It's got a wonderful feel about it. It's a haven from all the dirt and destruction — the nothingness — outside.'

Klara's description of the world beyond her house as a place of *nothingness* is evocative and revealing. It belies a feeling of disquiet and alienation within the midst of the larger social landscape of Rabaul. It is not, of course, accurate. Beyond the nothingness were communities of Papua New Guineans carving new lives out for themselves.

In Chapter Four, I focused on how the expatriates had begun to dis-identify with the Australian homeland by 1995 — arguing that Australia had become a place of lost origins and distance — removed in time and space from the immediate present. I argued that some expatriates felt forsaken by the progress of life *down south*: time passed too quickly there, stifling individuality and creative, masculine energies. Some used the term *Papua New Guinea Time* to describe the progress of

life in Rabaul. *Papua New Guinea Time* was in fact no time, no progress: Rabaul remained buried in ashes because Papua New Guineans took their time in putting things back together again. In 1995, many expatriates felt they were living life at a standstill, anchored in a present that incessantly repeated itself. There seemed no tomorrow. Klara maintained that Rabaul offered her little personally; she and Ray were prepared to endure the hardships because of continuing employment opportunities.

Many expatriates lived disassociated, rootless lives in Rabaul; this rootlessness had been to some extent a source of freedom before the eruption; however, in 1995, it was now a source of their marginalisation. This rootlessness says something about specific processes of dispersion and transformation taking place within the community: the dispersion of collective memories of colonialism as principles of localisation have been pursued by the Papua New Guinean Government; the lack of young energy being injected into the community; the emergence of time (rather than the movement through space) as the motivating force behind the experience of displacement.

In this concluding chapter, I explore expatriate feelings of sorrow and melancholia towards the physical landscape of Rabaul during and after the eruption. The ideas raised follow on from Chapter Two, which focused on representations of the landscape of the town in pre-eruption times. It looks at ideas of *disorder* in expatriate representations of the environment.

DISORDERED LANDSCAPES

In Chapter Two, I argued that expatriates had been both awed and fearful of the beauty of Rabaul in those years and months leading up to the eruption. Rabaul's beauty was a *terrible beauty* based on geological instability and destructiveness. Expatriates and other communities living in town were constantly reminded of this instability when *gurias* shook the town. The eruption served to confirm feelings of distrust as ash fell and destruction spread across the landscape. In this section, I argue that many of the expatriates saw Rabaul and Kokopo in 1995 as places reclaimed by disorder— as shanty-towns, as places of beginnings rather than established traditions.

In *Pumice and Ash: an Account of the 1994 Rabaul Volcanic Eruptions*, Sue Lauer wrote a personal account of her experiences during and after the eruption.³ She arrived in Rabaul in 1989 from Wollongong in New South Wales to work as a teacher at the Rabaul International School.

Sue and her husband Nick lived and worked through the eruption. Nick remained on duty at the Observatory during its early stages, at one point travelling to the Kokopo Road to observe more clearly the pattern and development of the volcanic clouds.

When it became obvious that an eruption was imminent on the morning of 19 September, Sue and her children evacuated to Kulau Lodge on the North Coast

³See Sue Lauer, *Pumice and Ash: An Account of the 1994 Rabaul Volcanic Eruptions*, op cit

Road. After arriving at the Lodge, Sue began to experience real fear:

A huge cloud shot into the air, pale in colour, with a lot of water vapour. We assumed it was a harbour eruption. About ten minutes later there was even more noise. This time there was not only huge dark mushroom clouds, but also great chunks of pumice being shot into the sky. It was difficult to imagine their actual size if we could see them so clearly from Kulau Lodge (Afterwards we heard claims that some pieces were as big as cars!) Now I started to feel real fear. With Tauruvur there was great excitement but the enormity of Vulcan's eruption column made me appreciate the danger we faced. What if this led to the big bang? I was afraid for Nick... How could I cope without him?⁴

Later, when it became clear the volcanic eruption was not going to escalate into the *big bang*, Sue was saddened by the level of looting taking place in the town, despite the constant ash fall out and rain:

There were many odd and exaggerated rumours circulating [on the second day of the eruption]: there was no water in the harbour; the beehives had disappeared; there were three erupting volcanoes; the Kaivuna Hotel had collapsed; the Australian Navy was sending a ship to evacuate the area (two Hercules aircraft from Australia had landed at Tokua, bringing emergency supplies and evacuating some sick people and frightened tourists). Most were not accurate — except for the one about danger from looters and thieves. Earlier in the day Nick came across the RVO bus being used to ransack a trade store. It had been hot-wired. Undaunted, he demanded its return. Surprisingly the thieves acquiesced, but insisted they get to take their spoils to the village first.⁵

On the third day of the eruption, 'more and more people were anxious to check on their homes.' However, many of these had succumbed to looting:

A police presence was established at the fuel depot and police vehicles were patrolling the road — too late, however, to stop the looting. Most of the stores in Rabaul had already been hit, along with private homes. Just driving down the street it was obvious, with big holes smashed in the walls of houses or security grills ripped off. Any accessible vehicle left in town had either been stolen or smashed up in some way. It is amazing how crises bring out the worst in some people.⁶

On Thursday, the fourth day of the eruption, Sue returned to the town in a convoy to retrieve clothes and personal documents from her house on the top of

⁴*Ibid.*, pp16-17

⁵*Ibid.*, pg 21

⁶*Ibid.*, pg 23

Observatory Hill:

There were parts of trees all over the road, flattened vegetation everywhere and everything covered in ash and mud. Our house [which stood on the top of Observatory hill, with a view across Rabaul town] looked like a moonscape — house, water tanks, plants — all drab grey. The trees along the bank had snapped and lost most of their foliage. The bougainvillea was still clinging to the trellis but had lost all its colour. Our dog, Fritz, with his deep orange coat surprisingly free of grime, was the only bright spot. Inside the house was a depressing mess. The floors were covered in ash. There was even ash on the ceiling above the louvres and caked along the top of the curtains.⁷

She and the convoy of approximately twenty people decided to travel back together to Kokopo for safety reasons, as rumours were circulating ‘that rascals were putting bamboo spikes on the road in an attempt to stop and rob vehicles.’⁸

Looting enhanced the atmosphere of chaos and fear in town during the early stages of the eruption; as I argued in Chapter Three, this atmosphere of disarray had an enduring impact on the expatriates’ feelings of well-being and security in town: looting seemed an absolute act of vandalism, an act of hatred and sacrilege. Human and natural forces combined to destroy the township, making it uninhabitable, destroying its beauty, taking away the atmosphere of civilisation enjoyed by Tim Wilson, David Loh and other expatriates featured in this story.

Sue, her husband and children left Rabaul for Australia on the evening of 28 November 1994. Nick later returned to Rabaul again in mid-January 1995. Between April and May of 1995, Sue also made a brief return visit to the volcano town with her kids because

six months is a long time to be separated. We returned because the children needed to see what had become of Rabaul, of their friends, and of their school, since they had left Rabaul so soon after the eruption commenced.⁹

⁷Ibid pg 25

⁸Ibid

⁹Ibid, pg 71

What she saw both saddened and exhilarated her: trees and flowers had sprouted in the garden around her old home; greenery was returning despite the heavy sulphur content in the soil. However, what saddened her was the apparent lack of commitment of the authorities to re-establish an ordered town:

My feelings were mixed as we approached Tokua [Airport]. I felt like I was coming home but that feeling was soon eliminated by the reality of the place. Apart from a bit of hodge podge building at Tokua and in Kokopo there had been virtually no progress made in the five months since I had left. Kokopo was depressing. The waterfront area, which could be very attractive, was a mess of rubbish and decaying vegetable matter. The traffic conditions were chaotic. No effort had been made to improve the traffic flow or to provide basic parking facilities at busy locations such as the market....Kokopo could easily become an unattractive shanty-town.¹⁰

Rabaul and Kokopo were now at the mercy of contradictory forces: while processes in nature were returning some semblance of order to the landscape (via the regeneration of trees and flowers), human activity was in contrast generating disorder. Houses and businesses were being established without recourse to town planning; roads (such as Namanula Hill Road) were still in a state of disrepair. In a strange reversal of fates, nature was returning order to the landscape rather than the humans it supported.

Sue's recognition of the battle between order and disorder [in Rabaul] is not unique. Early representations of the Papua New Guinean landscape as a whole emphasised its primeval aspects and absolute foreignness. As I argued in *Chapter Two*, it was seen as alien and female, peopled by dark strangers and shadows. More recently, this battle has been played out in the film, *To Have and to Hold* written and directed by the Australian film maker, John Hillcoat. Hillcoat, most renowned for his film, *The Ghosts....of the Civil Dead*, visited the Highlands of Papua New Guinea in the mid 1980s. His experiences among the expatriates in the

area prompted him to write and direct *To Have and to Hold* on the Sepik River. Originally titled *The Small Man*, it was released in Australia in 1996.

To Have and to Hold revolves around Jack, a Frenchman, who falls in love with a young Australian romance writer, Kate, whom he meets while in Australia and who accompanies him back to Papua New Guinea. Once back in the Sepik village (where he makes his living screening violent videos), he develops a compulsive relationship and passion for Kate that is mixed with fantasy, power and an unresolved rage against his dead wife, Rose. In the ensuing drama, themes of violence, obsessive love and isolation are explored: Jack forces Kate to take on the characteristics and appearance of Rose. In an interview for *Cinema Papers*,¹¹ Hillcoat stated that the idea for the film came from early *film noir* like Hitchcock's *Rebecca* and *Vertigo*. It was inspired by

meeting expats in Papua New Guinea ten years ago. There is in the nature of isolation in the expat world a kind of neo-colonialism. I felt there was a connection between that and romantic love, and I wanted to explore that.

To generalize, it has to do with the projective nature of love, where one person projects their ideas and ideals onto another person, and that person, in turn, projects their ideals back. At times, that immense infatuation and obsession can actually go out of synch with the reality of the two people involved. You can project your own ideals onto someone else and yet not actually be in synch with whom that person is.

That is very similar to the relationship of people from the western world with a completely different culture like Papua New Guinea's. They project their own ideals onto that culture and set up a projected system.¹²

'[T]he expatriates....are a bizarre group that by virtue of their isolation enact fantasies of power and control.'¹³

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹See Andrew L. Urban, 'The Small Man: New Colonialisms and Obsessive Love', *Cinema Papers*, Oct 1995, pp13-17

¹²Ibid, pg 13

¹³Ibid

The oppressive atmosphere of the film is created through the use of sounds and by camera work which focuses on the natural environment— the sounds of distant, tolling bells, the sounds of insects buzzing in thick and humid air; the moist, green vegetation. The soundscapes in the film were deliberately designed to create a heightened ‘sense of reality’ and to emphasise ‘the nature of seduction: the accelerating excitement of infatuation and romantic obsession, plus the undercurrents of the environment, of insects, and the impression of sound.’¹⁴

As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Jack is obsessed by Rose because he is responsible for her accidental death. Realising that Jack is infatuated with the past and wants her to play a morbid role in its reconstruction, Kate escapes and returns to Australia. In the film, the green, lush environment of the Sepik is used to accentuate approaching horror and violence: the disorder of Jack’s mind; the disorder of his sense of the past in relation to the present. The disorder in the natural environment (the external landscape) becomes a metaphor for the disorder within the internal landscape of Jack’s mind.

Hillcoat alluded to historical representations in his film. Many expatriates living in Rabaul in 1995 also alluded to historical representations in peopling the landscape of Rabaul with anarchic, unfathomable forces. What had been regarded as ordered and meticulously maintained was now regarded as unpristine and disturbing.

¹⁴Ibid, pg 17

EXPATRIATE MELANCHOLIAS

Rabaul's volcanic potential had long been recognised by East New Britain provincial authorities before September 1994. A Rabaul disaster plan was completed in June 1983 by a consultant from the office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator.¹⁵ This plan

covered national arrangements, organisations in ENBP, alert stages and volcanic hazards, disaster control centre arrangements, general disaster response, the Rabaul eruption response, a larger eruption and extended evacuation, and supporting plans. Four alert phases were defined.¹⁶

Rabaul town was, as I mentioned in Chapter One, placed on Stage-Two Alert in October 1983, signifying the possibility of another outbreak of volcanic activity within weeks or months. While no eruption eventuated, many expatriates, including Chinese Australians, used this opportunity to *go finish*, returning to Australia permanently. Most expatriates in Rabaul in 1995 had not experienced the 1983/85 seismic crisis; it was therefore easy for them to disregard its many lessons. It was partly for this reason that expatriate evacuation of Rabaul was uncoordinated and fragmented: expatriates were unable to accurately read the early warning signs of the eruption on 18 September. Many began evacuating only after the villagers from Matupit had begun their procession out of town.

Throughout this narrative, I have argued that the expatriates were unhappy with the lack of progress in re-establishing essential services in town. Even though there was clear evidence of life returning to the region, many were full of the memories of what the place had been like in earlier times. In this section, I look at

¹⁵See Sue Lauer, *Pumice and Ash*, op cit, pg 13

¹⁶Ibid

expatriate melancholia and nostalgia for the *taim bipo* — focusing on their feelings of loss and unhappiness.

In her poetic study, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva described melancholia as an ‘incommunicable grief,’¹⁷ a ‘sad voluptuousness, a despondent intoxication’ which makes up ‘the humdrum backdrop against which our ideals and euphorias often stand out...’¹⁸ Melancholia is experienced by individuals during ‘periods of crisis’, manifesting itself as feelings of loss, bereavement and absence.¹⁹ These feelings ‘trigger the work of the imagination and nourish it permanently as much as they threaten it and spoil it.’²⁰ Kristeva focused her study on responses to human loss and destruction; nevertheless, her definition of melancholia is applicable to the range of feelings experienced by the expatriates surrounded by their devastated landscapes.

In his diary entries published in *Paradise Magazine*,²¹ John Beagley described in detail the first day of the eruption — the spectacular natural and human drama unravelling before him as he evacuated first to Kerevat and then to Kulau Lodge:

On reaching the road [to Kerevat], vehicles are bumper to bumper, and there are now thousands of people moving along the north coast road. I fill my vehicle with people from Kabakada village and join this great stressful serpent winding its way slowly out of town. There are huge trucks overloaded with humanity. Every bus and car is crammed full of humanity. We feel sorry for the elderly and the very young moving with blank faces along the side of the road. The cloud of ash is now moving so fast that it is ahead of us.²²

¹⁷See Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989, pg 3

¹⁸*Ibid*, pg 5

¹⁹*Ibid*, pg 8

²⁰*Ibid*, pg 9

²¹See George McKie and John Beagley, ‘Diary of a Disaster,’ op cit, pp 5-10

²²*Ibid*, pg 7

At standstill during the evacuation, he wrote:

While we are at a standstill, the news comes from behind us that the ash is now falling in the Kulau area. We seem trapped, and await the fall. I manage to pull to the side of the road where I am advised not to park under a rain tree. Ash collecting on the branches is likely to cause the limbs to break, crushing anything below them....After two hours, I resolve to try to make it back to Kulau Lodge. I arrive late afternoon to what I can only describe as a science fiction movie set. The sky is black, with dreadful spears of lightning shooting straight to the earth — some directly into the maw of Vulcan.²³

On Tuesday, 20 September, he decided to leave Kulau Lodge and make his way to his original destination:

All day the ash continues to fall with occasional breaks. During the afternoon I obtain a litre of petrol and set off in my vehicle in another attempt to reach Kerevat. The road has fewer cars. The trees and bushes are covered in thick grey mud and the atmosphere is a darkish yellow...Near George Brown High School, the road becomes thick, yellow mud — the landscape totally alien — the coconut palms folded down on themselves like grey umbrellas, and the air is filled with fallout...Close to evening I arrive at the Kerevat Club which has become a sort of unofficial care centre... Outside, the ground is covered in about two or three inches of queer grey spongy ejects — very peculiar to walk on....²⁴

A year after these experiences, John Beagley recounted to me a trip he had made to Rabaul several months after the eruption:

I came past Vulcan the way it is now and you drive through all this dust and there's this thing looming there that wasn't there before. And I said to them [the people who were accompanying him], 'This is really eldritch.' And they said, 'What's that other than somebody's name? And I said, 'You must know the word eldritch!' And they said, 'There isn't a word like this.' So David [Loh] looked at his new beaut computer and said, 'I've got the best dictionary and it's rejecting it.' Eldritch: unearthly. That's what it is now; *it's not of this world*. That area there. Standing in that tephra and everything is grey and weird and piled up.... Somebody said to me that they were driving through all that greyness and all of a sudden there was a blue plastic bag in it. And it looked so out of place. I mean, the *whole place* has been destroyed — the coconuts are down, it's all buggered up — and here's this *plastic bag* full of rubbish! And the person I spoke to said that their first reaction was, 'How dare it be there!'....No, the plastic bag shouldn't be there...To me, it's weird and I want to be through it and I want the coconuts back!

John felt only loss in returning to the grey desert[ed] landscape of Rabaul; it no longer felt familiar and comforting to him.

²³*Ibid*, pg 7

²⁴*Ibid*, pg 9

Ewen Fenwick returned to Rabaul the second day of the eruption to shovel ash off the roof of his electrical business in Malaguna Rd. Day after day he came into town to help get the Coconut Products Limited mill in operation again. He would drive past

roads you'd driven on for years [that] suddenly weren't there any more. We had a road through one of the graveyards there at one stage and we were driving past there every day and there was a fresh grave with flowers. And each day the flowers would get... browner.

Because he encountered the greyness of the landscape of Rabaul every day in 1995, his senses were dulled:

Myself and Mike Catley went up to the [Vulcan] road when it first opened 5.30pm one afternoon and it was then that that there were no ridges of gullies; it was just...like a snowfall. Mike calling me up on the radio: 'It reminds me of the Antarctic.' There wasn't a sound. There wasn't a breeze. There wasn't a bird. There was nothing. We were just driving around the area and feeling insignificant. You feel small. You wonder if it's going to go bang while you're beside it. Things like Tranquillity Base come to mind. Now it's been scarred by weather. It's not something I think about now: that is, the way it was. It's accepted. I definitely remember being awed by it that first day. I will remember that to the day I go.

What David Loh remembered most about the landscape of Rabaul during the eruption was the great stream of people walking along the North Coast Road on the Monday:

At the end of *Fiddler on the Roof* — you know the story? It's the Jews being kicked out of Russia — the Russian Jews are looking for somewhere else to live since they can't live in Russia. There is this line of hundreds of people on stage and they sing that song *Sunrise Sunset*. You've probably heard that song before. They're plodding in silhouette across the stage with their bags on their backs, and they're just plodding in one direction. One thing in mind. With the sun setting in the background. And that's the exact image I had of the North Coast Road that day. No screaming, no yelling, no laughing.

David evacuated from town to Nonga four hours before the eruption. The New Britain Lodge was next to Queen's Park; this was one of the 'mustering points' identified in the 1983 United Nations disaster plan. David pointed out that on the

Sunday before the eruption

a lot of people still remembered those points and they went there...there were just thousands of people sitting there. Sitting there. Silently waiting for something to happen and nothing happened. No cars came, no trucks came. They sat there and sat there and didn't know what to do.

It was only when the Matupit villagers left that the people in the park began evacuating Queen's Park and town.

David was at Nonga when he saw people running down the road shouting, 'Mountain fire! Mountain fire!' He felt 'shocked, not scared.' When Vulcan erupted, the fear set in:

It was not terror, but bordering on that when Vulcan blew up. That was the really scary one because it was noisy. Tavurvur was silent. But [the noise from Vulcan] was deep-throated that scared me, with this incredibly enormous white cloud that just went up miles and miles in the sky and kept going up.

David's New Britain Lodge was destroyed by the eruption. When he went to inspect it several days after the eruption, it was

cleaved right down the middle. I had ten rooms on one side and apartments on the other. But the middle was gone, the dining room, the restaurant, kitchens, my house, had gone...'

In 1995, it was still covered with ash. Despite the uncertainty of life in Rabaul, David was trying to rebuild it with the assistance of Papua New Guinean *wantoks*,²⁵ trying to get the internal walls built again. The success of this reconstruction was bound up with the fate of the town: if the town were rebuilt, the task of rebuilding the Lodge would be easier.

²⁵Somebody who speaks the same language, or who is from the same province, village or country. See Klaus Neumann, *Rabaul: Yu Swit Moa Yet*, op cit, pg 178

Peter Read argues that an individual's sense 'of continuity of person and community [is] intimately bound up with spatial identity.'²⁶ This is one of the reasons why the loss of a place through natural disaster (or any other means) is so devastating: emotional investments are made in homes and places. The destruction of a beloved space can feel like the destruction of the self. David maintained that Rabaul was beautiful despite being buried in ash. He felt saddened that the authorities appeared to be investing in Kokopo and were unable to see Rabaul's beauty. The fate of the Lodge was also bound up with David's future in Rabaul. He did not expect to live much longer; however, if he had the security of a business behind him, then the prospect of living his life out in Papua New Guinea seemed reasonable.

Peter Read calls return journeys to lost places, 'returning to nothing.'²⁷ This is in part an accurate description of the return journeys made by expatriates to lost homes and gardens in Rabaul. However, in the case of David Loh, the return is not a return to absolute nothing. By rebuilding the Lodge, he is investing it with presence, with dreams: dreams are an intangible way of transforming nothingness into hope. While hope is often fragile, it is more robust than memories no longer relevant to the present.

²⁶See Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing*, op cit, pg 21

²⁷*Ibid*, vii

Conclusion

Beverley and Colin Benton are expatriates who lived in the grounds of LAES in 1995. Colin worked as a consultant agriculturalist; before the eruption, Beverley taught at the International School in town. At the end of 1995, they returned to Australia permanently.

Prior to the eruption, they lived in a house in Hobart Street in the Chinese precinct of town. Late in the evening of 18 September 1994 they evacuated, driving to a vacant house in the grounds of LAES. Their house in Rabaul was later destroyed by the eruption.

Three weeks after the disaster, Beverley and Colin went to a friend's place for a 'champagne breakfast — because everybody was on a high to see people.... You were completely isolated from your contacts in town.'

Following breakfast and champagne, Colin suggested they return to the house in Rabaul to salvage for belongings. In late 1995, Beverley still remembered the strong emotions accompanying that particular trip home:

So we went in our champagne gear to the house and it was the first time I felt any emotion. Before, you didn't have time to feel any emotion. And I looked at *where* the pot plants had been, completely covered; *where* the cactus had been; and then at the front roof this little animal poked its head out from underneath the fallen roof. Then two other little animals poked their heads out, and the one that poked its head out was that doberman [gesturing towards the dog in the garden.]

..So she came out because she'd been living across the road and knew us. We called her out: she had no hair, she was covered in sores. The smell was atrocious...I saw the dog and I broke down. And Colin said, "You're not having it!" And I said, "I've got to have the dog." So the dog came. But that's the first time I felt emotionally distressed about the whole thing.

Until this trip, Beverley had had little time to dwell on her emotions and confront

her feelings of loss. However, in witnessing the plight of the dog, emotions stirred into life, leaving her desperate and shaken.

In the years leading up to the 1994 eruption, Rabaul had been famous for its beauty and for a history dominated by dramatic cycles of destruction and rebirth. When the Rabaul volcano erupted in 1937, it killed over five hundred people; the town was completely destroyed by aerial bombardment in the Second World War. Rabaul's beauty and fragility was often honoured through songs and ballads. For former expatriates like Anne McCosker living in exile in London, it was a beloved home, a place to honour through poetry.

However, when the volcano erupted again on 19 September 1994, this beauty was destroyed as homes and possessions were lost. An atmosphere of mourning fell over the town. Arriving in Rabaul in September 1995, I found myself a witness to an enduring sorrow and disquiet within the Australian community: I was struck by how many expatriates were unable to come to terms with the recent past. Although there was some evidence of life returning to Rabaul town, the atmosphere of mourning had not dispersed. This thesis has explored the ways in which the expatriates have grappled with their feelings of loss and mourning — focusing on themes of alienation, displacement, memory and personal and collective sorrow.

During the course of this thesis, I have looked at how the expatriates in Rabaul regarded the natural environment before and after the volcano with mixed and nostalgic feelings, how they saw themselves *vis a vis* other communities in Rabaul; and how they positioned themselves in relation to their cultural background and heritage. In so doing, I have attempted to present a multi-faceted

picture of their present circumstances and to explore ideas of place, memory and experience. In Chapter Five, I introduced the voices of former expatriates into the thesis as a way of re-framing issues already raised, presenting an alternative perspective on the experience of expatriatism in Rabaul.

James Clifford has pointed out that members of a diaspora often lead complex and paradoxical lives: their sense of identity is split through time and space; is formed in the spaces and shadows between the old and new country. Identity in the Australia diaspora in Rabaul was similarly complex. Their concept of community and identity was constantly being negotiated on the margins. This process was particularly poignant: not only did they have to confront the loss of historical privileges and identities; they also had to grapple with personal loss and sadness.

The tone of this thesis has been sad. However, there is some hope. While Beverley and Colin Benton left Rabaul feeling disillusioned, others have remained. Graeme and Dawn Little, for example, are still in Rabaul, although they have now moved from their beautiful home at the end of Page Street. In a letter Graeme wrote me in August 1997, he expressed optimism and hope. He is now working for Ela Motors, a car dealership based in Kokopo in 1995. In 1997, it established a second shopfront in Rabaul town itself which he manages. In his letter, he mentioned feeling over-worked but 'happy.' Although Rabaul was still covered in ashes, he and Dawn were beginning to enjoy life again. A new house was going to be built for them in Kokopo. At a greater distance from Rabaul and the puffs of smoke rising from Vulcan.

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